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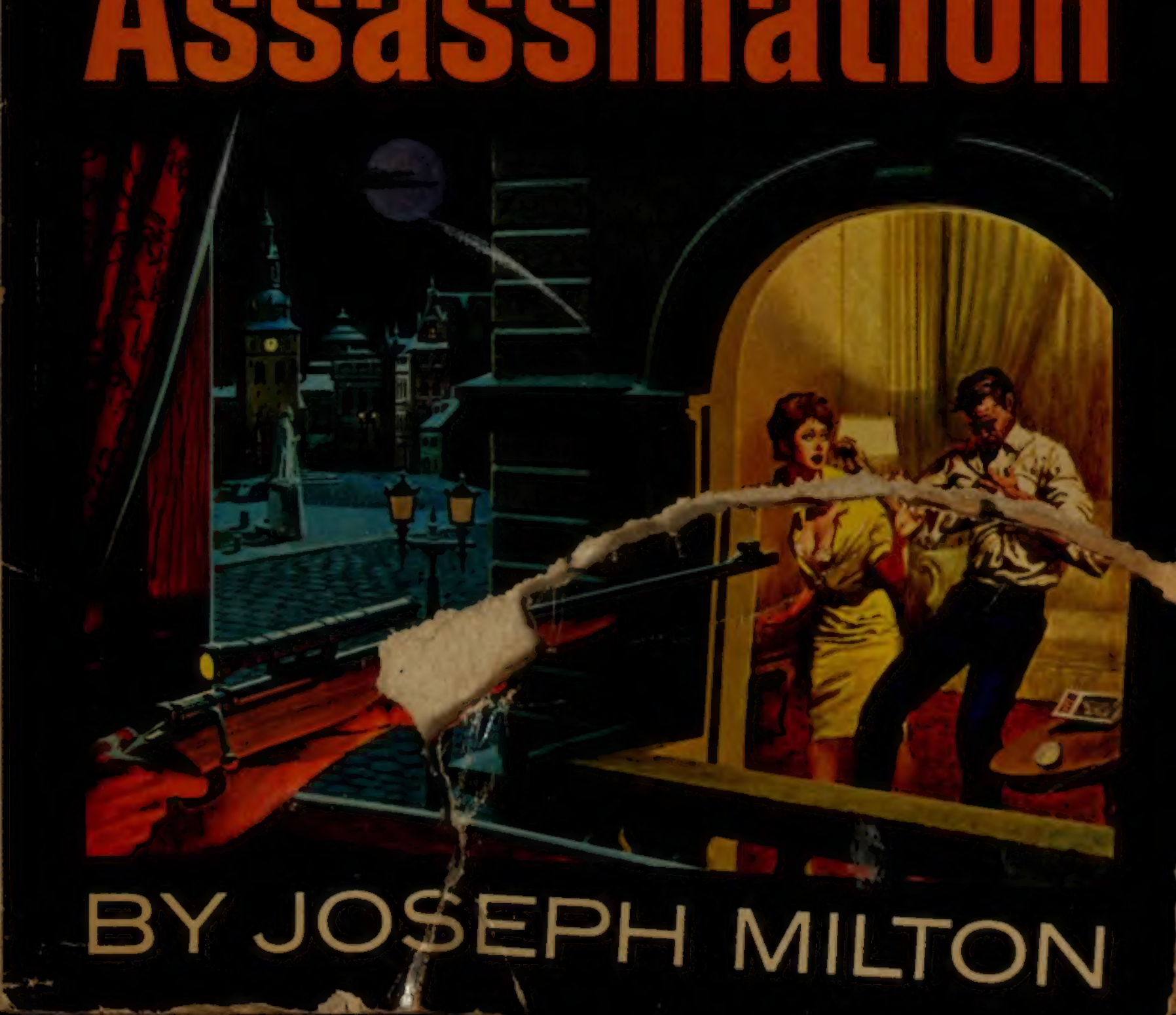

BY JOSEPH MILTON

DEAD MAN'S RETURN

Peter Barton died in 1945 in Germany. He was one of America's greatest war heroes.

Philip Bainbridge appeared in 1964 in a small Balkan republic. He was a red foreign agent, part of an intricate and mysterious plot, and a deadly menace to America's future.

They were both the same man.

And Bart Gould, President's Agent, had a double mission. The first part was to find out what Barton-Bainbridge was up to, and what was behind it. The second part was to stop him . . . no matter how!

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COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

ASSIGNMENT: ASSASSINATION

Joseph Milton

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Chapter One

He sat high on the arm of the heavy upholstered chair, looking steadily out the window, and high above him the late moon shone small and brilliantly white, lighting the square below him pale and deeply shadowed. Lights burned in several windows of the buildings around the square, and the dim street lamps formed a pattern of squares from where he sat. He could not see the statue that stood in the center of the square. His eyes moved slowly, scanning the street below him, and every few seconds, turned back to one window directly across the square. The window was still dark.

He took a cigarette from a case in his pocket and lit it, inhaling deeply and noting the brightness with which the lighter flame burned, showing the room around him suddenly lit yellow. He snapped the lighter shut and checked the luminous dial of his wrist watch. Then he looked out across the square. The window he was watching was still darkened.

He heard the heavy-throated exhaust of an automobile and looked down to see it move across the square and turn into a far street. A Mercedes, he thought absently. A 540-K. They are still running, and you cannot miss them from their sound, especially when they cut in the supercharger, and it starts to scream so that they don't need a horn to let you know they're going to pass you. His thought was brought up short as he heard the sound of laughter from the street below. A woman's laugh, light and gay. He looked down and followed a couple as they crossed the square, holding hands as they walked, the stuff of the woman's dress catching dots of light as she moved, and the flash of her long legs as she stepped easily across and then into the darkness around the statue. He waited until he could see them on the far side of the square, coming into the light thrown from the hotel entrance. They are going into the bar, he

thought. The bar with the white walls and the gilt moulding and the *Empire* chairs. And the girl will lean forward in the candlelight, and the shadows will all fall warmly. And I wonder how she looks in candlelight. Her laugh sounded like she goes well with candlelight. And all this, he thought, does not go well with what I am waiting for.

He looked quickly up at the darkened window again, and, once more, checked the time on his watch. His jaw muscles tensed as he watched the window, and the sounds off the square did not divert his mind from the window now, or from the reason for which he was waiting.

He looked across the square and in his mind estimated the distance from the window where he now sat to the darkened window he was watching. He had estimated this distance many times during the past hours, at first before dark, when the square below had been crowded with people and cars and motor bicycles, and later, as it had darkened and the sounds from the street had diminished, and then faded away into the lateness of the night, he had figured the distance again and again, while he waited. One hundred and fifty yards, he thought. Give or take ten, but that's close enough. Yes. Now all that is left is the waiting. What you are doing is the only thing that can be done. I don't like it, but there it is.

And as he sat waiting at the window of his darkened room, Bart Gould thought rapidly back over the things and people and factors that had led up to this moment. This moment, which, when he had thought about it, once he knew it was the only thing he could do, he had felt would be like other times he had waited, once in the blind near the waterhole at the edge of the Serengeti, the Kikuyu tracker making him nervous with the constant stream of advice. And, another time, waiting and glassing the rocky outcroppings high up there in the thin cold air where you shot chamois from one mountain top across to another. But this was not like those other times of waiting. He should have known it would not be.

"To find out what's behind it, or who," Banning had said. "Just to find out means nothing. You understand me?"

Gould had nodded, sitting across the desk from the older man. They had been in an office that looked out across the lawn toward the Washington Monument.

Banning had removed his glasses then and held them in his fingers, opening and closing the side pieces over and over again, as he told him the rest of it.

"It's a small country," the older man had said. "So we have a pretty good check on every dime that's going there. Then we learn about this bank account in Zurich, and nothing adds up. Anastas Krasnovic is more than just the Prime Minister. He's a national hero, rose through the ranks of an Agrarian Reform movement 'way back before the war. Knows what his people want, and knows the Republic."

"He led an irregular force all through the war, didn't he?" Gould asked.

"Yes. Between him and Tito and Mikhailovic, no matter what you might have thought of them, they kept ten German divisions busy all through the war."

Gould smiled. "They did a nice piece of work screwing up the Nazi withdrawal from Greece, too."

"Yes. That's when we first got to know Krasnovic. Some of our men were in there with them. OSS. Then the war ended and the Republic settled back into the usual farce of a Balkan Republic's internal intrigues."

Gould laughed. "Like an operetta by Rudolf Friml."

Banning grinned. "Yes, but the era of princesses with heaving clefts and assignations in the greenhouse after the state guests all departed, all that is a thing of another time."

"If it ever existed at all."

Banning's hands stopped moving the eyeglasses. "Oh, it existed, all right. Still does, matter of fact. In plenty of non-Balkan capitals."

"Like Washington?" Gould asked lightly.

Banning scowled. "Anyway, the Republic played several ends against the middle for a good many years, and Krasnovic was in and out of office as a cabinet member of the left of center group. For a while they courted Moscow, then us, then both at the same time. Then the Russians turned on the loud pedal in Hungary and the Re-

public got scared, so they moved into our camp exclusively."

"And now things don't look right?"

"It's not that," Banning said. "It's a question of figuring it all out fast enough, before something happens. Look, Krasnovic is clean. Our people have spoken to him. He knows the deposit in Zurich exists, and in his name. He doesn't know how it got there, or who planted it. And he's scared to death about it. We've suggested his bringing it all out in the open, but he absolutely refuses."

"Why?" Gould asked.

"Any admitted involvement might ruin him. Good point, actually. You know, a trial hardly ever convicts a man as rapidly as a good piece of circumstantial evidence. In any case, we had decided to wait and see what the next step of this was going to be. We were pretty sure whose work the bank account was, so there was a pretty exact place to keep our eyes on."

"Moscow?"

"Exactly. If they could bring off this planted bank business and then make a world wide exposé, they could blow Krasnovic's government wide open as corrupt, anti-proletarian, or what have you. There was only one hitch to this theory."

"Yes?"

"They weren't doing anything. Nothing. No political or ideological infiltration. No anti-American propaganda in the Republic. Not more than usual, that is. Then, last week, something happened. I should say *someone*."

"Oh?"

"An American named Philip Bainbridge arrived in the Capital, traveling from Istanbul through Greece into the Republic. Checked into the plushest hotel there, the Europa, and set himself to the personal task of being the most detestable tourist ever to visit the Republic."

"What has that to do with Krasnovic?" Gould asked.

"Nothing, we thought. One of our men went around to see him, after there had been a small scandal between Bainbridge and Krasnovic's daughter, to see if they could chuck him out of the country, or tone him down, at least. The man from the consulate took one

look at Brainbridge and his eyes almost fell out of his head."

"Why?"

"The consular man had been a captain with the Yankee Division in the ETO during the war."

"The Twenty-sixth?"

"You know the division? Good. Well, do you remember the legend of Peter Barton? Technical Sergeant Peter Barton."

"I remember something. Yes, the Krondheim bridgehead."

"Exactly," Banning said, and nodded. "Barton crossed a bridge into this German town, leading an assault squad. Then the Krauts blew the bridge, and killed every one of our men but Barton. And while almost a whole battalion watched from ringside seats on our side of the river, Barton practically cleaned out the whole town, grenading machinegun emplacements, knocking down defensive positions, even disabling three batteries of antiaircraft guns that had been turned down for flat trajectory fire into our troops. Then, he topped it off by towing a cable back across the river so we could shoot in a pontoon bridge and he led a new assault group over and established a solid bridgehead for our men to move into. During the action later that day, Barton disappeared. They found his ID tags and his gear, but they never found him. He was listed as missing in action, presumed dead."

Gould remembered then, the legend that had grown around Barton's feat. It had been picked up by the newspapers across the country, and even a song had been written about the legend of Peter Barton. He had been awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously, and had entered the sacred rolls of America's great heroes.

Gould looked at Banning's eyes. "Peter Barton is Philip Bainbridge, I take it."

"You take it?" Banning stormed. "You're damn right, he is. No mistaking it. And get this, the passport's a phony, and we've backtracked his movements as far as Istanbul. No man by the name of Philip Bainbridge, or Peter Barton, is on record as having entered Turkey

from any place, but somebody remembered seeing a man of Barton, or Bainbridge's description, getting off an Ilyushin transport jet several weeks ago."

Titus Banning had forced himself to speak softly, after that, and detailed the rest of the story as they knew it. Philip Bainbridge had continued to move uninterrupted in the higher social circles of the Republic, while at the same time making a rather unsavory spectacle of himself in public. Our consular people had done nothing, despite the forged passport. They had decided to do nothing rather than act and be forced to reveal that their great hero, thought long dead, was now suddenly very much alive and acting very much in the manner of a belligerent *agent provocateur.*

Gould had listened to Banning, while sitting in the small plain office there in the White House, and looking out across the lawn, past the Ellipse and Constitution Avenue toward the tall monument. What he had really been thinking about was what had happened to Peter Barton in the years that had passed from the day he disappeared in the town of Krondheim, until he was seen in Istanbul. Almost twenty years, he thought. What had they been like? What had Barton done, and where had he been? Then Gould's thoughts were stopped when he heard the voice of Titus Banning telling him what he would have to do when he got to the Republic.

"When *I* get there?" Gould demanded.

"Yes. I haven't been telling you all this for my health."

"Why me?"

"You speak Slovene, for one thing."

"That's a matter of opinion."

Banning smiled and tapped a file folder on his desk. "I've referred to a very accurate source of opinion," he said.

"My teacher at Berlitz?" Gould said and laughed.

"No, the story of your childhood years. Several summers rambling along the Adriatic coast. Split, Dubrovnik, Trieste, Venice."

"I was hardly a child then," Gould said, smiling warmly as memories began to drift back to him.

"So much the better. This matter must be acted upon. And we cannot act officially."

"Why?"

"I've already told you about conviction based on circumstantial evidence. We can't touch it, without admitting that we suspect something, and that way we'll end up looking black no matter how it comes out. The Republic is an autonomous state, and we aren't going to stick our official necks into this thing. Philip Bainbridge is tied to that Swiss bank account, unless every line of logic is wrong. We've got to know what's going on, and why, and that's the beginning of where you come in."

"The beginning?"

"Yes. You've also got to stop it."

They talked a while longer and then there was a telephone call for Banning. The manner in which Banning spoke to his caller left little doubt in Gould's mind as to who was at the other end of the line. Banning had said something about not being sure, then looked up into Gould's eyes and smiled, waiting quietly, the phone to his ear. Finally, after Gould had had a momentary flash of memories, of the Adriatic, the old walled town of Dubrovnik, the girl who had been there with him and who had died in that senseless way, and whose death had changed his life because he had never married after she died. Now he spent his life doing everything that could not really matter any more. Then he nodded slightly. And that was that.

Now, as he sat in the dark, in his room on the fourth floor of the Grand Hotel in the capital city of the Republic, his thoughts returned from the meeting with Banning in the office of the White House. He was here now, had been, in fact, for nine days. He had managed to meet Brainbridge, calling him Barton the whole time, spent several evenings with him. There had been one night with two women off a yacht in the harbor, and Barton had danced with his girl on the after deck, and then suggested swimming nude. And there had been a fight, with Barton drinking all night, and he tore the clothes off one of the girls, and Gould had to get him back to his suite at the Europa across the square. And that was how he had managed to search his room. Barton had talked a lot that night, calling himself Barton-hyphen-Bainbridge, and speaking with a bad false British accent.

He spoke of Katerina Krasnovic, and her father, the "great white-haired god" of the people, and that he, Bainbridge was going to knock the skids out from under the Republic, and weren't we Americans going to get red in the face. Then he had passed out, and another man in the party had gotten angry and wanted to slap him. Gould had pretended to fall asleep there, too, and the other man had gone off, muttering to himself. That was when Gould got to search Bainbridge's suite. He had found nothing, until he opened an armoire and brought out a long narrow piece of luggage. He recognized it as a gun case before opening it.

The case in Bainbridge's suite held a Springfield M1903A4 rifle with a high power telescopic sight. It was the cleanest, newest actioned Springfield that Gould had ever seen. An automatic inspection of the weapon had brought a smile to Gould's lips. At the muzzle of the barrel was the small flared mark of a star-gauge barrel, the most prized of all Springfields. Finding the rifle, Gould began to add up everything Bainbridge had said, the manners in which he acted, his remark about Krasnovic. He did not omit, within himself, his very great dislike for Bainbridge, how it had struck him the moment he met him and grown with each time he had seen him. Here was a man who appeared to value nothing, to derive his pleasure from doing harm, inflicting pain. He remembered the pleasure Bainbridge had gotten from taunting the girl on the yacht, then tearing her clothes. He seemed a man with only one outlet: drink. Gould wondered again about what had happened to him in the years since his disappearance, where he had been, and if the Germans had taken him. And how he had gotten to Russia, and what he had done for all these years.

In the compartment of the gun case that held cleaning equipment, Gould found a folded paper. It was a large-scale terrain map of the capital. A blue pencil line was drawn around a small area near the outskirts of the city, a large building on a high rise of ground. The lettering on the map was in Russian, but Gould was able to discern the name printed next to the building. It read Krasnovic. There was a small mark, again in blue pencil, on a place on the map close to the circled building. The

contour lines on the map showed this mark to be at the crest of a low hill. Gould looked at the map for a silent moment, then quickly glanced to the bottom of the map to see the scale of the drawing. It was in meters and he saw that the distance between the blue pencil mark and the circled building was about one hundred meters—three hundred feet, or a bit more.

He folded the map and replaced it with the rifle in its case, and stood it back in its place in the armoire. Then he turned to the unconscious figure of Bainbridge on the bed, realizing that he was looking at the planned assassin of Anastas Krasnovic. It all clicked into place in that instant. Bainbridge had appeared, out of nowhere, an American with money to burn, and whose actions had aroused no protest from American officials. Then, the prime minister of the state is assassinated, and the story is suddenly revealed that there was a huge bank account in Zurich in the prime minister's name. Logical explanation: Krasnovic was a corrupt official, extorting money from American economic aid funds. Americans learn of this and send over an "agent," Bainbridge, to eliminate errant prime minister. It could make marvelous reading, handled by the proper agencies, Gould had thought. And the agencies were probably hard at it by now, preparing the reading matter for distribution in the Republic. The result would be obvious. Krasnovic's government would fall, America would be condemned for gangster tactics in dealing with someone who had done them in, and an atmosphere would descend on the Republic that would be ripe for a move by Moscow. They would not even need any staged *coup d'etat*. This small thing would be tailor-made for a take-over.

Gould's first thoughts had been to assassinate the assassin. But he had dismissed them immediately. Then, gradually, the thought began to return, mingled among other manners in which to deal with Bainbridge. Every pattern of action Gould had devised had boomeranged on itself, in his mind's eye, into an incident that would profit the Russians. Finally, he knew that there was no other way.

Now, sitting at the window, he ground out his cigarette and wiped his palms on the upholstery of the chair.

Then, still looking out across the square at the window of the Europa, he reached down and raised his rifle across his lap. It was a gun with which he was not familiar, a Swedish-made Mauser type 30-06 Husqvarna, which had been drilled and tapped for a seven-power scope sight. The rifle had been a problem to come by, and Gould had finally chanced buying it, discussing with the clerk in the shop the game conditions in the northern mountains of the Republic. He had weighed the chance against his other alternative, taking Bainbridge at the close range his pistol would have required. The Mauser Hsc was absolutely useless at anything over twenty yards, and the Europa was quite a hotel to fire a pistol in and then get away unobserved. The rifle was the better way, and buying it as he had, while discussing the ways of hunting boar and stags here in the Republic, plus having hired a car and mentioned the intention of driving north to the mountains, was by far the safer chance to take.

He raised the rifle and sighted through the telescopic sight, seeing only blackness in the dark. He lowered the rifle again, hefted it to familiarize himself with its balance, and sighted again. He brought the rifle around to where he knew the window in Bainbridge's room was, and as he held it there, looking into the sight, he saw the light suddenly come on in the sitting room of Bainbridge's suite.

Chapter Two

BART GOULD lowered the rifle quickly, and dropped from the arm of the upholstered chair to the carefully balanced position of a kneeling target shooter, his right knee down and his body set directly over the support area, his raised right heel serving as a seat, and the weight of his left arm and the rifle resting lightly on his raised left knee. He had placed his left knee at an angle to the window across the square that would allow his head to face the target without twisting and affecting his balance. Now he placed the side of his face against the cool cheekpiece of the rifle stock, and, steadying himself and the rifle until they were like a single object, trained the muzzle of the rifle on the lighted open window in Philip Bainbridge's suite.

The intricate details of a gilt wall sconce showed suddenly clear and sharp in the eyepiece of the telescopic sight, and he lowered the muzzle a fraction to bring the sight down. Then he saw the girl. She was one of the women from the night on the yacht, the dark blonde. Her hair was drawn back tightly, accenting the slant of her gray eyes. She wore a gold-colored silk knit dress, and as Gould watched through the sight, a hand came to rest on her hip. Her arms came up and Philip Bainbridge came into view in the sight, moving close up against the girl. The girl's arms moved around his neck, drawing him closer to her and their faces touched.

Gould shut his eyes tightly for an instant, then blinked once or twice. He saw Bainbridge's arms around the girl's waist, his hands moving roughly over the planes of her body. The girl's hands suddenly dropped from around his neck and she began to push against Bainbridge's chest. He drew back and smiled. The girl's face was rigid, but she smiled tautly with her mouth. She said something, and Bainbridge's smile broadened. Then he said something and his hand came up and cupped her breast,

squeezing it. The girl placed her hand over his, and moved it away. Gould could see her nipple risen against the thin material of her dress. Bainbridge's hand returned to the breast, and the girl moved back slightly. He drew her to him roughly and forced his mouth against hers, bending her head back hard as his hand sought the top of the fastener at the back of her dress. The girl pulled her face away from his and placed the side of her head against his ear, her lips moving in rapid speech. Bainbridge's hand slid down the girl's back and the material of the dress was falling away from her shoulders. She stepped back suddenly, and the front of her dress fell away, revealing the white lace brassiere which covered her full breasts. The girl did nothing to cover herself, but raised her hands to the sides of her face, then shook her head and began to speak rapidly again. Then Bainbridge was next to her again, forcing the dress down lower from her hips as she continued to speak. He looked up at her and smiled his cold smile again, then placed his fingers on the brassiere between the cups and tore it away from her body. She covered her breasts with her arms, but Bainbridge pinned her arms behind her back with one hand, and as they struggled, his other hand caressed and squeezed first one, then her other breast. The hand seemed to have no relation with the rest of Bainbridge's body, the rest of him restricting the girl's movements rigidly, while the hand moved gently, smoothly, over the fullness of her breasts and their rose tipped nipples. Slowly, the girl's body began to relax, her struggles softened, and Bainbridge's grip on her arms behind her back released. She immediately stepped back, covering herself with her arms again, and he moved in on her, his face ugly now, and hard. His arm went up and was brought across sharply. The girl's head snapped to the side, and she fell back, out of view of the window.

Still supporting the rifle in his left hand, Gould slowly raised his right hand to the bolt, bringing it up sharply and drawing it back, then slamming it home as a cartridge was jacked up into the chamber. The sight of the rifle had barely vibrated as he loaded the chamber. Now, with Bainbridge standing free and clear in the window, looking down and talking, probably to the girl whom he

could not see now, Gould slowly grasped the pistol grip of the stock and curled his finger around the trigger, the crossed hairs in the telescopic sight centered squarely on the left side of Bainbridge's chest.

Gould felt a tension in his back. He registered automatically that his position had not been correctly assumed and the balance of his body was not resting on his spine, but was twisted slightly, straining muscles that would affect his control over the weapon. Too late now, he thought, and blinked once more as he began to apply a squeezing pressure against the trigger of the rifle. Bainbridge had not moved. His right hand had come up, doubled into a fist, and he had stroked the side of his jaw with the back of the fist, then smiled and continued talking. Now he was absolutely still again. Gould, for an instant, thought about what the girl was doing now.

Then it happened. As he was straining the trigger to the point where he knew the spring would release the bearing, he heard the high sharp crack of a rifle being fired, and, still sighting through the scope, saw Philip Bainbridge thrown back, clutching his chest, the life already gone from his eyes.

He lowered the rifle, still looking across the square, suddenly surprised by how far away the window appeared without the scope sight. The light was still on, but everything was quiet. He looked down at the square, just as a figure emerged from a side entrance of the Europa. The figured limped hurriedly across the pavement toward a parked car. As the figure approached the car, Gould thought he could hear a woman scream. The distance had thinned the sound and he was not sure. Now he saw a door of the car open and the limping figure stepped in. The car moved rapidly away from the curb, swinging around the square and was gone. The car had been a yellow Citroen, a new DS-19, and had made almost no sound as it drove away, its sleek body being enveloped completely by the darkness of the night.

He listened carefully a moment longer. He did not hear the sound he had thought was a scream again. No other lights came on. No sound reached his ears. Nothing had been altered by the sudden crack of the rifle, ex-

cept that in his suite at the Europa, Philip Bainbridge was now dead, the girl, perhaps, too. Gould looked down at the rifle in his hands, and rapidly snapped on the safety.

He did not, at first, wonder who had fired the other rifle, or whether the girl had been killed in the room along with Bainbridge, or even who the limping man had been. He wondered only why Bainbridge had been killed. What had altered the plan? Or had he, Gould, deduced Bainbridge's role wrongly? He thought suddenly of the Springfield rifle with the telescopic sight in the armoire in Bainbridge's room. Had Bainbridge been killed with that rifle? And, then, suddenly, he began to think of who had done it. His mind flicked back rapidly over the people he had met in the evenings he had spent with Bainbridge. There was always the chance that this had something to do with the night he had humiliated the girl on the yacht. A yacht always meant a man, and a man might think enough of a woman whom he brought aboard his yacht to want to do something vindictive to another man who had done some of the things Bainbridge had. But it would all be too simple, that way. And that way usually involved a small pearl-handled pistol, a lady's gun, a Berreta or a Browning 25, or perhaps one of those intricately engraved Gelesi automatics. No, the shot he had heard was from a high-powered rifle.

It suddenly crossed Gould's mind as more than strange, perhaps even more than coincidental that while Bainbridge was in his suite, determinedly seducing the blonde girl with the slanted gray eyes, two parties, unknown to each other, were observing him through the high-powered telescopic sights of precision rifles. Then, looking down at his hand as it trembled, Gould wondered if, had he been uninterrupted, would he have gone through with it. He knew he would have, but somewhere, deep down inside him, he felt a slight sense of relief that he had not had to, in the end. He wondered at this, and once again began to think about who actually had done it for him. For me, he asked himself. It was surely not done as any favor to Bartholomew Gould, boy. That's pretty damn sure.

He crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed, resting the rifle across his knees, and lighting a cigarette slowly, forcing his hands and fingers to perform the action of raising the cigarette to his lips, opening the lighter and flicking the wheel, carefully, raising the flame to the tip of the cigarette and snapping the lighter closed, then inhaling long and slow. He removed the cigarette from between his lips and exhaled smoke through his mouth and nose, forcing his body to come down from the taut level that the last minutes had forced it into. He knew any thinking he did now would be thinking along one road, or perhaps two, but never, in this unnatural haste, could he force his mind along all the paths that were required for a proper perspective of what had happened and what he should do now. He inhaled again slowly, then his jaws tensed suddenly at a sound outside the door to his room.

They got Bainbridge, his mind registered automatically. And now, they want me. He stood up quickly, moving to a corner of the darkened room, breathing through his open mouth and stepping quietly, listening to the latch of his door. It sounded as if it was being turned tentatively, being tested as to whether it was locked. Gould knew he had locked the door behind him. It gave him that much more time, perhaps a few seconds of indecision on the part of whoever was outside.

He stepped quietly to the opening side of the door and stood flat against the wall, the rifle in his hands. He remembered the safety being on, but did not release it. The snick of metal might carry through the door.

The latch clicked again, then the door moved slightly as a hollow sound of something being forced against it sounded. The sound came again, and the door flew open, a blade of light from the corridor falling across the carpeted floor. Two men rushed in, both with drawn pistols. Gould raised the rifle and brought it down sharply, smashing the wrist of the man closest to him. He lunged past the first man, jabbing the muzzle of the rifle into the midsection of the second man, then throwing his weight after it. The second man was thrown off balance, and Gould turned swiftly. The first man was on his knees, groping with his left hand for the pistol that had

fallen. His right wrist seemed to be smashed. Gould brought the rifle stock hard against the side of the man's head, heard him grunt wheezingly, and fall over. He heard a dry snapping sound from the darkness, and turned, seeing in the spill of the light from the doorway, the second man struggling with the slide of his automatic. The pistol had misfired on the cartridge in the chamber, and the man was crouched down, trying to force the slide back to eject the bad cartridge. Gould rushed across to where the man was crouched, seeing the man turn toward him as he came. The man looked at the muzzle of the rifle and suddenly stopped forcing at the slide of his pistol.

"Drop it," Gould ordered.

The man just looked up at him, but did nothing.

The muzzle of the rifle flashed out in Gould's hands. When he stepped back, Gould saw a trace of blood snaking down the side of the man's head. The front sight had cut his temple. Gould gestured with the rifle, and the man dropped his pistol on the floor. Gould stepped backward across the room, looking down for an instant and stepping over the unconscious first man, then pressed the light switch and closed the door with the toe of his shoe.

He turned to face the crouching man, seeing him on his knees now, resting forward with his hands on the floor. The man's eyes turned up at Gould's face, then flicked for an instant down to the pistol laying near him on the floor. Gould moved slowly toward him and kicked the pistol across the room, then stepped back and switched the rifle safety to its fire position.

The man on his knees was large. His hands, spread flat on the floor, covered an enormous area, and there was a heavy growth of black hair on the backs of his fingers. His eyes were set wide apart, above prominent cheekbones, and his hair was cropped very close to his head. The back of his neck was shaved high to where the first stubble of hair began, about level with the tops of his ears. A long scar, beginning above the right side of his mouth, ran up along the side of his face and ended in a star-like lump next to his right eye. The end of the scar flattened the cluster of tiny lines at the corner of his

right eye, and added to the oriental appearance of his face. He bit his lower lip, then wet his lips with his tongue and looked up at Gould and smiled.

"All right," the man said. "Now you shoot. Yes."

The man narrowed his eyes and smiled again.

"You kill the other one," he said to Gould. "Now you shoot me."

Gould turned for an instant to look down at the first man. "He is not dead," he said.

"No. The other one. The American. You kill him."

Gould narrowed his eyes. "Who are you?"

The man raised himself and rubbed his huge hands together, then opened them, palms up. He inclined his head. "Ashukian," he said. "Hagop Ashukian. Republic Security police."

Gould said nothing.

"You do not believe me," the man said. His eyes flicked for an instant to a point behind Gould. Gould spun about. The man was still out. He turned back rapidly. The big man was now standing.

"I'll ask you once more," Gould said. "Who are you?"

The man closed his eyes and tilted his head to the side, curling his lips. "I tell you. Ashukian. Hagop Ashukian. Republic Security Police. Please?"

He drew open the lapel of his jacket, indicating an inner pocket. Gould nodded. The man took a large leather billfold from the inside pocket that had a broad red elastic band around it.

"You read Slovene?" he asked.

"Yes."

The man opened the billfold, stringing the elastic band over his hand, and unfolded it to a plastic window that held a card which he held up for Gould to read. The card showed the man's photograph and the official seal of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic.

"You're Armenian," Gould said.

The man nodded. "Him," he said, pointed to the prostrate figure behind Gould. "He is Yugoslav. You hurt him good, break his hand?"

"Why?"

"Don't like. He run from Yugoslavia after war. Must

be somebody no good. All right. Now, American Bainbridge. You shoot him."

"I didn't shoot anybody."

"You enter Bulíc Sportsmagasin, Boulevard 17 December, two days ago," Ashukian said blankly. "You buy Swedish Husqvarna rifle. Calibre 30-06. Carl Zeiss Jena telescope sight, power eight, one box fifty cartridges. Correct?"

Gould nodded.

"That is the gun?"

Again Gould nodded.

The man called Ashukian said nothing, but raised his hands again, palms up, and made an explosive sound with his lips. "I arrest you, Mister Gould."

"I didn't kill him," Gould said.

"Telephone call to Minister of Interior says you will kill him tonight. So? Tonight, he dies."

"What happened to the girl?"

"Girl?"

"He was with a girl tonight. She went with him to his rooms."

"No girl."

"Who placed the telephone call to you?"

Ashukian touched his temple where Gould had cut him with the rifle sight.

"Why do you kill Bainbridge, Mr. Gould? Maybe you love Katerina Krasnovic?"

"Did she call the Minister?" Gould asked.

Ashukian smiled broadly. "You really do not know who called?"

"No."

"Shall he have a Russian accent, Mister Gould?"

"How about your Russian accent?" Gould said.

"Mister Gould. You hurt me deeply. Anything, but not a Russian accent."

"You want to look at your friend?"

The man glanced past Gould. "I see him. He sleeps good."

"What about this Russian accent?"

"Maybe there is more," Ashukian said. "You killed Bainbridge, no?"

"No, goddamnit," Gould said. He thrust the rifle forward so the muzzle was close to Ashukian's face. "Here, smell."

The man sniffed at the muzzle of the rifle barrel, then raised his eyebrows. Gould opened the breech, ejecting the unfired shell onto the floor. Ashukian looked down, saw the unfired cartridge, leaned forward to look into the breech. Gould extended it forward.

"Maybe you use another rifle," Ashukian said.

"Where did I get it?" Gould demanded. "You seem to have kept an eye on me pretty well."

"All friends of Bainbridge have been watched."

"And there was no girl in his rooms tonight, you say."

"A girl went up in the lift with him," Ashukian admitted. "But no girl in room. She is pretty?"

"Very. Now, who placed the call?"

"Not who, Mister Gould, but *where* is the interesting fact."

"What are you talking about?"

"You like Armenians?" Ashukian asked.

"Never thought about it. I'm not particularly fond of the Turks, though."

"I begin to like you, Mister Gould. *Where* the call comes from that matters. You see, call comes into Ministry and is answered by Corporal Koleka, she is cipher clerk in my division. No names are given, only Koleka remembers Russian voice. But call is on international trunk line, so a record is made. Call was placed from outside Republic. You know where from? From Venezia. Gritti Palace Hotel."

Gould said nothing. Who was in Venice, he thought. And how would they know Bainbridge was going to be killed? My visit to the Bulíc Sportsmagasin was just a convenient coincidence, but I was saved the job on Bainbridge by about five seconds, and a difficult blonde. And the bank account in Zurich?

"Why did you ask me about Katerina Krasnovic?" Gould asked.

"You ask too many questions, for a police prisoner," Ashukian said. "Now you answer me something?"

"What?"

"You were going to kill Bainbridge, that I know. You did not because it was done for you. Why were you going to kill him?"

Gould looked at the man for a long time without speaking. Well, he thought, somebody had to be trusted.

"He was going to assassinate your Prime Minister."

"An American?"

"He was a Russian agent."

"Aha. *Avod*. I know something like that must be. That is why American consul does not throw him out. Right?"

Gould wondered now how wise it had been to take this man even this short way into his confidence.

"I don't know about that," Gould said.

"You CIA, maybe," Ashukian said. "Interpol. They work here once to stop movement of Turkish opium. Kill six Turks north of here, in Kotor Bay. Good case."

"I'll bet."

"If I don't arrest you, Mister Gould, what do you do now?"

"You won't arrest me," Gould said. "And what I do is my affair."

Ashukian grinned. "Now, Mister Gould, please. You speak of protecting the sainted life of my country's Prime Minister. Do you not value the assistance and freedom which can be offered by the Security Police? Come down with me. I send doctor for my Yugoslav friend and we drink some *Arrack* and seal a friendship."

Gould relaxed a bit. "If you could manage some *midia dolma,* and a few flats of *lachmadju,* I might be tempted, Ashukian. But I haven't got time for a party."

"So you know good food, too? Time, but always time. Americans never have time. Where do you go now? To hunt boar in the north? Maybe in Venezia?"

"I was told there is a road across the frontier through Pristina and Novi Pazar that crosses the Ibar near Kragujevac," Gould said. "The boar hunting is said to be the best in this part of the continent."

"It can be said to be marvelous right here in the capital. Or perhaps, in Venezia. Santa Lucia, *lasagna verde, lacrima christi.* All species of boars."

"Perhaps Katerina Krasnovic too?"

"One never knows."

"No, does one?" Gould said. "And while you stand here, the man who killed Bainbridge is getting away."

"Mister Gould, does it really matter to you, this killer of Bainbridge?"

"Shouldn't it?"

"That is a personal matter for yourself and your sense of patriotic ardor for my Prime Minister. For me, it is either you, or only one other."

"Who is that?"

"The name is of no importance," Ashukian said. "But the rifle will most probably be one of the M91 types. The bolt is of a two-piece construction, and is entirely unique in weapon design. But very obsolete."

"And very accurate," Gould said.

"Perhaps. But why does this interest you? They have done your job for you."

"I'm beginning to think I'm the next customer," Gould said. "Ashukian, I will trust you to remain in this room for at least one hour. Otherwise I will be obliged to either have to join your friend there on the floor, or tie you to a chair."

Ashukian smiled. "Can I offer you the oath of an Armenian?"

"I've heard opinions of an Armenian's word," Gould said and smiled.

"Mister Gould, remember this name. Giorgio Coradi, Corso del Fuseri, Venezia."

"Who is he?"

"He operates an *anticcheria,* whose main purpose is to divest American tourists of as much money as possible. He can see that you are not killed too easily in Venezia."

"Thanks," Gould said. He placed the rifle on the floor. "This is yours, for your trouble."

"What do you use for the boars?"

"Mauser," Gould told him. "Hsc. 7.65 calibre, and an old friend. What will happen about Bainbridge?"

"Bigger heads than you or me will squash it all, I feel sure."

"And the M91 type rifle?"

"What is the point?" Ashukian said. "There were more than two million of them manufactured after the first

war, I believe. In the United States, as a matter of fact, for resale to Russia. Interesting no?"

"Goodbye, Ashukian," Gould said.

"Pahrev, Gould. I will contact Giorgio Coradi."

Gould nodded and smiled once more, then turned and left the room, closing the door softly behind him. If I get out of the lobby, I will not have misjudged Ashukian, he thought. He made his way along the broad corridor with its high vaulted ceiling, the heavy carpeting silencing his footsteps. He looked at his face as he passed a large mirror hung on the wall over a marble-topped console table. And Philip Bainbridge-Peter Barton is dead, and it will, as Ashukian said, be squelched by bigger heads than me. The Russians? Krasnovic? The Ministry of the Interior? Or the party who placed the bank account in Zurich, and, perhaps, made a telephone call to Corporal Koleka of the Ministry of the Interior from the Gritti Palace Hotel in Venice?

He reached the broad stairway and listened as his footsteps rang on the marble, looking up at the tree-like crystal chandeliers. The corridors he passed as he descended were empty, and the hotel stood mute, like an ancient castle that had seen its state dinners, and, perhaps, its ramparts breached by some insurrectionist mob fighting for bread.

In the lobby, the assistant manager and the concierge with the crossed keys on his lapels both bowed slightly as he passed them. People were walking slowly in the lobby and others sat in heavy chairs that looked as if they had been there since long btfore the sainted Prince George had cleared the Carpathians of mountain lions. Nobody stopped him. Nobody seemed the least interested.

He stepped out along the curb from under the marquee of the Grand Hotel, and turned the corner quickly to where the car he had rented earlier that day stood parked. He had had the doorman place the car there. It was pointed in a direction leading across the square and through to the main thoroughfare north and out of the city, where he would drive, ostensibly to the boar country, but in reality, he now knew, to the frontier where he would cross into Yugoslavia and on north through Metkovic and Split and Benkovac, and farther

north, cross into Trieste and around the head of the Adriatic to leave the car at the Piazzale Roma and hire a motor launch to take him to the Gritti Palace hotel in Venice.

He stopped near the car, turned and looked around in both directions, pressed his left arm against the Mauser in the holster under his coat and stepped off the curb to enter the car by the door at the driver's side.

As he opened the door, the faint light from the street lamps reflected a shape in gold, and in a sudden turn he saw the flash of long legs twisting as the girl turned up to face him.

"*Sdrastvoyche,* Mister Gould," she said.

It was the blonde with the slanted gray eyes.

Chapter Three

GOULD BROUGHT his right arm up slowly, as his left rested lightly on the car door. He could not see the girl's hands, and as he moved his arm, he looked down at where they should be resting in her lap, waiting for the instant flash of a muzzle. He wondered if he would remain alive long enough to remember having seen a gun fire. His hand reached the opening of his coat. His eyes glanced up at the girl's face. She smiled briefly, and despite the near dark, he could see a terror written in her eyes. They were flat, seeming to have no depth, and now that the smile had vanished, there was a tightness at the corners of her mouth.

Her eyes went down to his coat, then back up to meet his.

"They were supposed to kill me, too, I think," she said.

Gould did not take the pistol from the holster under his arm. He just stood there, touching the open door of the car and looking in.

"I was in the room with him when it happened," the girl said. "I went downstairs to the casino, but my people, the ones from the yacht were gone. I do not know anyone here. They did not tell me he was going to be killed. I must go someplace, away from here."

Gould let his breath out slowly, and climbed into the car, settling himself behind the steering wheel and drawing the door closed. Then he turned and looked at her again. Her arms were visible now, crossed over her bosom.

"I went to your hotel, but they told me at the desk that two men were with you," she said, speaking very rapidly now. "I don't know anybody else, do you see? I could not go up there. I just couldn't. I asked the footman at the door and he told me your motorcar was here. He showed me where. I sat here waiting. If you did not come down,

it would not matter, anyway. It would have meant they killed you, too.

She stopped speaking suddenly and looked at him for a moment.

"You don't know who I am, do you?" she asked. Then her hands came up and covered her face, and she began to shake all over.

Gould reached out and pulled her hands away from her face. She looked up at him, and slowly her trembling subsided, and she tried the smile again.

"I didn't know they were going to kill him," she said, softer now. "I will return the money they gave me. I will say nothing. They are probably going to kill me."

"The people from the yacht?" Gould asked.

"No, no. You don't understand. I came on the yacht from Cannes. I could not stay with those people. Then I met the other one, Zarov."

"Who is he?"

"Russian. I don't know. He limps. He, I don't know how to say it, he engaged me to be pleasant to Bainbridge. I must go someplace, away. Do you leave here?"

"Why did they kill him?" Gould asked.

"I don't know. I was there. I saw him die, but I don't know. I want to be away from here. I could not go to the harbor. They know I can only go there. There is no place else for me to go. They will wait for me there. It is my chance to get away. Do you leave here now?"

She turned and looked into the rear seat. He turned, too, and realized she was looking for luggage.

"You are not going away," she said.

"Why do they want to kill you?" he asked her.

"They kill everybody," she said. "I saw them work before. I saw them in Roma. There was a conference, at the Hassler Medici, and Nenni was going to speak. He had been approached by one of their men with instructions, but something went wrong. The man had had his own ideas, and Nenni must have told them. They killed him. He fell from the *solaria* of the Excelsior. Two days later, his girl friend was struck by a car on the Via Veneto. She knew nothing. She was his girl friend because he had friends with *entrées* to the studios at *Cinécitta*. She

wanted to become a cinema *artiste,* and she died for the effort. I know them."

Gould placed the key in the ignition and started the engine.

"Where do we go?" the girl asked.

"The harbor, first," he said.

"No."

"You can get out here," Gould said. He reached across, past her, and threw the door open on her side. "Come on, go. I don't have time to fight with you."

She pulled the door closed, and looked at him, as he released the hand brake.

"And after the harbor?" she said.

Gould did not answer her. He let in the clutch and turned the car into the square, steering around half the circular street that followed the square, then turned into the westbound street at the side of the Europa, that dropped down toward the harbor. He knew the dock-side where the yacht was tied up. It was across the shore road from a group of three resort hotels that had been built with government financial aid in recent years, in the hope of fostering a tourist interest in the Republic's "Riviera."

With the lateness of the night, the streets were deserted, and the driving was fast and effortless. Several times, Gould turned briefly to look at the girl. She sat in the seat next to him, motionless, her face a blank mask. In the glow of a street light entering the car from her side, Gould could see that the girl had dressed hurriedly in Bainbridge's suite, disregarding the torn lingerie. Beneath the silk of her dress, the shape of her breasts showed full and unsupported. She saw the direction of his glance, and crossed her arms over her chest.

He slowed as the downhill road began to level out near the water. It ended two streets ahead, and the shore road, cutting across it, would lead them to the docks where all the small yachts and small sailing craft were tied up. They had to turn to the right to pass the area.

"Please," she said.

"What?"

"Stop the car and let me out here."

"No."

"They are waiting to kill me. Please."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"What does it matter? Just let me out." She reached out to grasp the steering wheel, but Gould held her wrist tightly. He brought the car to a slow halt just before the turn into the shore road.

He turned and looked at the girl again. The light of the waterside lights came across the road through the windshield and he studied her face for a moment, before speaking. He glanced down at her bosom for an instant, then at her face again.

"I always dress this way," she said.

He nodded, and blinked his eyes. "What's your name?"

"Monique Clermont."

"Why did you greet me in Russian, before?"

She wet her lips. "Bravado, I suppose. I have learned that one knows they are still alive, in times of danger, when they can find something to be humorous and think about it. I don't know. I talk too much."

"And why did you come to me?" he asked.

"A port in a storm, perhaps," she said. "And, too, the night on the yacht, there was a human-ness in your face, when he tore the girl's clothes off."

"A human-ness?"

"Yes," she said, and shrugged. "The others seemed merely to be interested in seeing what the girl looked like without her clothes on."

"But now you're frightened of me."

"Yes. I think so."

"But you do not run from the car. You can now, if you wish," he said, reaching to open the door for her.

She pressed back into the seat so that he would not touch her. He stopped to look into her eyes, very close to his now, as he leaned across her, holding the door. She stared back, impassively.

"Where would I run to, Mister Gould?" she said.

Gould leaned back, resting his hands on the steering wheel. Someone was waiting for the girl, what was her name, Monique, yes, near the dock where the yacht was tied up. The yacht had come from Cannes. The people on the yacht were not the ones, she said. I did not understand. Who was Zarov?

"Where are your things?" Gould asked her.
"On board the yacht."
"You will have to go without them."
"*C'est rien,*" the girl said. "Where do you go?"
"Does it matter?"
"No," she said. "What have I to lose?"

He looked at her, having noted the trace of resignation that had entered the tone of her voice. For her, he imagined, anything that had ever involved a man had always ended with her on the short end of the stick. There was a certain hardness about her manner that seemed forced, a shell she maintained despite the fear that was controlling every breath she took now. She was lovely, he thought. But something about her depressed him. He did not know how to describe the feeling to himself. Like the actress who begins by striking for stardom, but somewhere along the way, hardens and resigns herself to the casting couches reserved for bit players. Too caught up in a way of life to think of trying something else.

But yet there was a warmth to her, that she could not keep hidden. He wondered whether there was not a greater naiveté that took a girl like this and set her down in a world she neither understood or cared about, but only felt she wanted more than life itself. He wondered how many Mediterranean ports she had been stranded in, and how many cars like this one, with men driving them, had taken her across how many frontiers to other Mediterranean ports where other yachts were always waiting. She was beautiful enough for the circuit, but she did not have the nickel-steel bearings needed to climb to the real top of the garbage heap.

And how much of my hour of grace, granted by the policeman Ashukian, have I used up, he asked himself. He looked at his watch, but the time, 4:10 a.m. meant nothing to him. He brushed a hand over his eyes. And what has all this to do with a bank account in Zurich, Switzerland, in the name of Anastas Krasnovic? *We open in Venice,* he said to himself, and smiled. And on to Zurich, maybe. Very big maybe.

"How much do you know about Bainbridge?" he asked her.

"Nothing, practically."

"His friends?"

"You were his only friend, so far as I knew," the girl said.

God help him, Gould thought.

"And Zarov, you know him?"

"I spoke with him. He gave me money. Gould," she said, suddenly. "I do not think I will live very long."

Gould turned his head as a car drove past where they sat, cruising easily along the shore road. Its tires ticked as it moved by.

"Listen to me," he said, speaking fast and evenly now, the conversational tone, and any emotion gone from his voice. "I am going to turn this next corner and follow the shore road. I will drive fast enough so that no one will recognize you. When we pass the yacht, see if you can recognize anyone, except the people from the yacht, of course. We will not stop, so don't worry."

"Where do we drive, after this?"

"North, out of the city," he said. "I'll tell you later."

"I can come with you?" she asked.

"Of course."

He turned the car slowly into the wide avenue that was the shore road, and they could see, out beyond the seawalk lights, the string of markers of the harbor breakwater, a green light at its end, and, farther out on the water, a slowly blinking red signal light. The street lights were brighter near the small cluster of hotels, the Republic's "Riviera" that had never materialized, and where, across from them, the dock walks stretched out over the water. There were many boats tied in along the docks. This was the pleasure fleet of the Republic, the boats owned by the small class who had not seen it in themselves to move down from the Europa or the Grand to the newer hotels when the season was on.

As they approached the dock area, Gould slowed the car. The road was empty, and no people were on the sidewalks. The hotels and dock walks were lit by no more than strict utility after-hours lights. It was very quiet. They passed the area without having seen a thing. The lights in the girl's yacht were all darkened.

As they continued north along the shore road, Gould looked back at the area in the rear-view mirror. They

were passing under a long string of overhead lights, now. Between the lights, the road was dark, but under each, a short section of the road was clearly lit. As he glanced back, in the mirror, he saw the headlights of a car turn into the shore road and begin to travel along behind them.

The girl exhaled and rubbed her eyes.

"I was wrong," she said. "I am sorry, Gould."

He nodded silently and watched her undo the tight black hairdo, from the corner of his eye, as his glance turned occasionally to the mirror. The car was still behind them, its distance the same as when he first noticed the headlights.

The girl undid her hair and tilted her head back, shaking her hair out and placing her hands behind her neck. She looked at Gould and smiled. He smiled back, and, at the same time, relaxed his pressure on the accelerator pedal, letting the car slow down.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing." He kept his eye on the mirror now, waiting for the car behind them to close the gap. It didn't. It had slowed to match his pace. He pressed the accelerator and the car's engine came to life, surging ahead along the straight road. The headlights stayed with them. Gould kept up the high speed for a short distance, then suddenly took his foot off the accelerator and braked the car to a crawl. The headlights rushed up behind them, closing the gap rapidly. The car drove up behind them, passing suddenly under one of the overhead lights, as Gould watched. It was a yellow Citroen.

He pressed the gas pedal to the floor and the car jumped ahead once more, gaining speed steadily as they began to reach the northern edges of the city.

"Do you always drive like this?" the girl asked.

"What's the matter?"

"I think I am getting, how do you say, *mal de l'auto.*"

Gould forced a smile. "It will be steady now. I think there was something wrong in the fuel line."

He did not tell her about the Citroen. He liked the way her face looked now, with her hair down and the muscles in her jaw soft and relaxed. They drove on in silence until they had left the last of the city behind them, and the

coast road began to break and climb into the mountain road that led to the frontier. The Citroen was still close behind them. After a time, the girl closed her eyes and seemed to be asleep.

The driving became hazardous now, with the road climbing steadily into the mountains and turning sharply. There were no stretches of straight road here, and in the turns, when Gould could see for an instant in the rear-view mirror, he could tell that the Citroen behind them was closing the distance between them rapidly.

Chapter Four

THE CAR in which Gould and the girl were driving was a Tatra 603, one in which the brakes had not been very well cared for. The rear-mounted engine was somewhat unfamiliar to Gould, and caused him to constantly oversteer. But the gray little car held the road very well, and now that he began to feel some authority of handling, he pressed the accelerator lower to the floor and did not let up the speed coming into turns. The girl was still sleeping, despite the constant turning that caused her to shift endlessly in the seat next to him. He glanced up for an instant as the lights of the Citroen showed in the mirror.

All right, he said to himself, let's see if you still know how to drive a car. He settled himself easily behind the wheel now, sitting well back and gripping the wheel firmly, his arms extended almost without a bend at the elbow. He braked slightly for the turn ahead, still maintaining good speed, and set the little car into a drift, judging the turn and mentally noting his past tendency to oversteer the rear-heavy car. The wheels slipped as they sped into the turn, and Gould stepped hard on the accelerator, coming out of the turn without shifting gears. The car shot forward into the long winding uphill ahead of them.

Come on you little gray bastard, he said inside himself, urging the car forward up the inclining road. On the rise, there was a sudden dip, and at the speed they were making, Gould felt a sudden sinking feeling in his stomach. The car shot up over the hill and slipped into a reverse curve downhill now, Gould braking suddenly as he saw a string of reflectors along the road ahead indicating a sharp left turn. He executed a rapid double-clutch and reduced gears, the engine behind them growling as the car ground into the turn. As they were turning, the girl suddenly came awake.

"What is it?" she asked, sitting up straight.

Gould did not say anything. He depressed the clutch again, lowered the gear still further and roared out of the tight turn. In the short straightaway ahead, he quickly shifted through the sequence of gears back up to high, feeling the car respond cleanly to each change and pressure on the accelerator. The car was lit up suddenly by the lights of the car behind them. Gould noted that he had gained on the Citroen.

The girl turned and looked back. "What is it?" she asked again.

"The car behind us," he said. "We're being chased."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. But they seem to mean business."

"What kind of a car is it?" she asked tautly. "Did you see what kind of car it was?"

"A Citroen. Yellow. DS-19. Two men."

"Zarov," the girl said.

"The man with the limp?"

The girl did not answer and Gould looked at her for an instant. The flatness was back in her eyes and she returned his look and nodded.

"All right, Monique," Gould said. "I know this may not be the time for it, but I want you to start telling me everything you know about this Zarov."

"I know nothing about him," she said.

She said something more but her voice was drowned out in a screeching of tires as Gould fought to keep the car on the road in a sudden turn.

"He is a Russian agent," she said, repeating what she had said as the car had skidded. "He killed Bainbridge and now he kills me, and you, probably, too. I don't know why. Maybe he believes Bainbridge talked to me, maybe told me things he should not have. I don't know. I thought Bainbridge was an American agent, until tonight."

"What made you stop thinking it?"

"He is very drunk and tells me he was once a rifle champion in the American army. Small bore rifle, I think he said. He tells me he is going to kill Krasnovic, the Prime Minister. I laughed at him and he slapped me. That is all I know about Bainbridge, except that I did not like him."

"What about Zarov?"

"Zarov and Bainbridge know each other very well," she said. "But they manage to appear not to know each other at all. One never goes near the other, and I think Zarov wants Bainbridge to be kept occupied. I think that is why he engages me to be with Bainbridge. But he never asks me to report about Bainbridge, to say what he is doing, who he is seeing, where he is going. No, I just think I was meant to keep Bainbridge diverted for no reason. Then, suddenly Bainbridge had no purpose for them, so they liquidate him. Now they want to kill me, maybe you too, so they can rewrite their history in their unique manner."

Gould thought about this as they drove. "In other words," he said, "to eliminate anything to do with Bainbridge, or anyone. As if he never existed."

"Oh, that they cannot do completely," she said. "But anybody who is close to him they stop from living. I think, Gould, that I am responsible for them being after you."

"Oh?"

"I am sorry," she said. He turned to her and she smiled dimly, pursing her lips. "We are gaining on them."

"Yes," he said, "but it doesn't mean much. This road has to straighten out, sometime. And they'll catch us then."

The girl hugged her shoulders and trembled slightly.

"Gould," she said. "I told Zarov about the night on the yacht, and that you had stopped Bainbridge and taken him back to the Europa. They must think you were very close to him."

"Maybe," Gould said. "But I searched his room that night. They must have found out about that somehow."

"You searched his room? But why?"

"It doesn't matter," Gould said. "I found the rifle he was going to use to kill Krasnovic. They must have found out that I had seen it."

He went over, in his mind, exactly where he had found the gun case and its contents, and whether, in his haste, he might have misplaced something, returning it. The map, perhaps, or standing the rifle case back on a wrong end. He had not tampered with its latches. They had been open.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know how they could

have discovered about me. But I think you're right. I think just knowing Bainbridge, or giving the appearance of having known him, was enough."

"What do you have to do with this?" she asked him.

"Not very much," he said. "I was just planning to kill Bainbridge myself."

He smiled, thinking of what he had just said.

The road climbed higher in a short straightaway; then, Gould pressing every bit of possible speed from the engine, constantly looking up into the mirror to check on the Citroen. The distance between the two cars was greater now. Then, suddenly, the road rose up from between the high stone facings and outcroppings, and they were traveling north on a level but turning road with the sea far below them on the left. The road was cut into the side of a steep rock facing, almost vertical on their right, and to the left dropping straight off toward the sea. This must be what they have been waiting for, he thought.

The girl was looking down at herself now.

"I was in Paris four weeks ago," she said, as if speaking to herself. "I would leave the salon at two o'clock and I could walk along *Avenue Georges V.*, and nothing could happen to me, except perhaps some men would look at me. I was very safe, then, you know?"

Gould was listening to her, as if from a great distance, concentrating on keeping the car on the road and not reducing speed, his eyes constantly shifting from the road ahead to the rear-view mirror.

"Now I am sitting in a car with a man I do not even know, and we are running. And I do not even know what we are running from. You know, Gould, I have become like a piece of very dispensable luggage on yachting trips. I was invited to Cannes by a man whose wife uses the couturier I worked for. We joined a yachting party of a Greek. Very nice yacht. Perhaps my victory is that I never went to bed with any of the men on that party. It didn't matter. They wanted only to have the others think they were having me. I think that meant more to them than actually having me. They were quite relieved when I stopped being in their party when we docked in the Republic."

"Hold on," Gould said, as they came up on a sharp turn

he had not seen. He braked hard but hit the accelerator almost immediately, drifting through the curve, and immediately looked into the mirror.

That Russian is a good driver, he thought. We can't keep this up much longer. We will be running out of road soon. If I figure correctly, we are not far from the frontier.

"There was another girl, then," the girl said, continuing. "She was with Bainbridge every night. Then, she stopped being there."

"Was that Katerina Krasnovic?" Gould asked, suddenly.

"Is that who she was? I don't know. After she stopped being with Gould, I met Zarov and he made his proposition. He did not give me enough to move into a hotel, so I remained on the yacht. But, as I said, I think the Greek and the man I came with were quite relieved about it. I do not even know the manners in which these people think."

"Which people?"

"The Greek with the yacht," she said. "Oh, Gould, what are we going to do?"

"Do you know this country?"

"I have been here before, but I do not know it. All countries are the same to me. We are near the frontier, I think. We have been going very fast. This is a hired car?"

"Yes."

"They will not let you cross the frontier in it, you know."

Of course, Gould thought. Hired cars were never allowed through a frontier by border control officers. So much for the drive up the coast. But I was thinking a bit too far ahead of myself, anyway, he thought.

He saw a point of light out on the water. A fishing boat, he thought, or a shoal marker. This is near where the islands begin. The headlights of the Citroen flashed behind them and lit up the car for an instant. The girl was drawn and silent now, looking at him. Everything she had been saying flashed through his mind again. He saw a rapid mental picture of her walking brightly along in the Avenue Georges V., and then living in a cold little world of her own on the yacht owned by a Greek. Then the

Russian with a limp, Zarov, and an arrangement about spending time with Bainbridge.

"They saved you from a bad time tonight," he said.

"Who?"

He nodded his head, indicating the car behind them.

"I do not understand you."

"In Bainbridge's room, just before they shot him."

"How do you know?"

He turned to look at her briefly. "I had the telescopic sight of a high-power rifle trained on Bainbridge from the moment you entered the room."

The girl raised her arm over her bosom again. "You killed him."

"No," he said. "They beat me to it."

"And you saw him? And me?"

Gould nodded.

They heard, behind them, a thin explosion, then another. A third of the cracking sounds came to them just as the rear window of the car shattered.

"Get down," Gould said. "They don't want us to get to the frontier."

The girl crouched low in the seat, and her head fell against his arm as he steered the car into a hard right turn. The road was heading in away from the sea now, probably toward the frontier control. The ground leveled out at the sides of the road, and they began to hear the whipping sounds of trees close to the road as they sped by.

"Monique," Gould said. "If we get to the frontier control, they will kill us there. I'm going to stop. When I do, it will be close to the edge of the road. As soon as the car stops, you must throw the door open and get off the road. Find a tree and get low on the ground behind it."

"No."

"Why not?" he said angrily.

"You don't understand, Gould. I just want to do something to help. I don't care any more. I am dead already. I hate only the waste of it."

Gould closed his eyes tightly for an instant. "I'm sorry," he said. "The best thing you can do is just what I told you. And be quiet. Whatever happens, don't move."

"If they kill you?"

"They won't kill me."

He waited for a tight turn, slowing enough for the Citroen to begin to close up behind them. He kept the car swerving from left to right across the road as they drove now, trying to keep them from shooting.

The sky was beginnning to lighten with the first signs of morning. He reached into his jacket and opened the clasp of the holster under his arm. He touched the cool metal of the Mauser's slide, finding the safety and snapping it down. Ahead he saw the road bending to the right. There were trees lining both sides of the road.

"This is it, Monique," he said. "Do as I told you."

He swung the car into the turn and jammed on the brakes, jerking the wheel to the right and turning off the ignition. The car ground to a stop with its right wheels on the shoulder.

"Now," he ordered. He saw a flash of the right door opening and dived out the left side at the same time, running swiftly across the road and kneeling beside a tree. The Mauser was in his hand, his thumb drawing back the thin hammer. He was glad now about the double action of this pistol. The exposed hammer could be drawn manually before firing and allow the slightest pressure for firing. Nothing to throw his aim off on the first shot.

The lights of the Citroen loomed suddenly bright as the car swerved into the turn and Gould heard the screech of the sudden application of brakes. It was too late. The Citroen smashed into the rear end of the Tatra, and Gould's pistol fired once, twice, a third time. He still saw movement in the car and fired again, dashing to the cover of another tree.

One of the Citroen's headlamps was still burning, throwing a beam up into the trees that lined the road. There was no movement in the car now. He reached to the ground, feeling about until he found a stone. He tossed it to the side, striking a tree and making sounds as it bounced in among a leafed branch. Still no movement or sound from the Citroen. Gould raised himself carefully, making no sound and not taking his eyes from the car.

"Monique," he called softly.

He heard a slight rustle across the road, then saw the silhouette of the girl as she stepped out onto the road.

She walked into the beam of the still burning headlight of the Citroen, and Gould's ear exploded with the sudden sound of a pistol being fired rapidly. He spun and emptied the magazine of the Mauser, running between shots. When he reached the Citroen, the slide of the pistol recoiled with a final shot and remained open. He was out of ammunition. He looked hurriedly into the car, then turned. The girl was still standing in the beam of light. Her hands covered her face and he thought he could see her tall thin body trembling as she stood there. The gold dress was soiled. He heard a sound, then her hands came down.

"Gould," she called out.

"It's all right," he said softly.

Her head turned in the direction of his voice. He looked back into the Citroen. Two lifeless figures were slumped in the front seat. He looked down at the Mauser in his hand, then pressed the magazine catch and released it so that he could draw it part way out of the stock. He then slid it back up into the receiver and felt the jerk as the slide ran back forward and closed. He replaced the empty pistol in the holster under his arm and went to the girl.

She looked at him, then wiped her eyes.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

He smiled and nodded. "We have a long walk from here," he said.

She looked down at the pointed-toe high-heeled shoes she wore, then breathed deeply and brushed her hands against the sides of her dress.

"It doesn't matter," she said. She looked up at the Citroen, then into Gould's eyes.

"They're both dead," he told her.

"Zarov?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid you'll have to look at them and tell me."

They walked slowly back to the car. Gould took out his lighter and flipped open the top, striking the sparking wheel and holding the flame into the car through the open window on the driver's side. His hand recoiled at what he saw. The girl turned away and covered her face with a hand.

The two men in the car were both dead. The driver was slumped forward, his face against the steering wheel. The entire back of his head was gone, and a large blood stain covered the back of the seat behind him. The other's head lay back, the eyes still open and staring. His right hand was fallen open in his lap, the fingers still coiled tightly about the stock of an automatic pistol. Gould turned and looked at the girl, then opened the car door and hurriedly went through both men's pockets. The driver carried only a flat billfold. In it, Gould found an international driver's permit, issued through the Automobile Club of Italy, Trieste office, in the name of Pavel Kranek. Holding the flaming lighter, he examined the photograph on the permit. He had not seen the man before. The registration papers for the Citroen were also Italian, issued similarly, in Trieste. The man wore a holster strapped across his chest. The pistol had not been taken out. Gould opened the flap and removed the gun, a Tokarev 7.62, the official Russian service automatic pistol. He put the pistol in his pocket, and went through the driver's other pockets. There was nothing else. He looked at the billfold again, noting that it had been bought in Florence, at the *Scuola del Cuoio* in Santa Croce. So the Russians can be tourists, too, he thought. He replaced the billfold.

In the other man's breast pocket, he found a passport case. It contained two Swiss passports, one in the name of the driver, Pavel Kranek, the other in the name of the second dead man, Michail Budin. Both were heavily used passports, carrying many border control stamps in the blank visa pages. In the large back pocket of the case, there was a considerable amount of currency, in Republic bills, Swiss franc notes, and five carefully folded Italian ten thousand lira notes. In the pocket of the case marked *airline tickets,* he found a folded slip of cheap paper and a photograph. He held the lighter up and studied the photograph. It was a candid shot of a young woman, her face turned three quarters profile. The background was the upper part of a shop window, and the lower portion of the lettering of the shop's sign. Gould could make out the lower half of several raised letters, and an accent mark such as used in the written language of the Repub-

lic. The woman herself was obviously studying something in the shop window. Her eyes were narrowed slightly, and her fine brows were lowered. Her hair, dark and cut short, was drawn back loosely over her ear. Her nose was straight and thin with a slight rise across the bridge, and her mouth was full, the lips pouted slightly, as if she had been photographed as she was figuring something mentally and forming soundless words with her lips. It was an aristocratic face, perhaps that of a young Italian contessa, or the mannequin of a Milanese designer. He turned the photograph over and studied the typewritten information which had been cemented to the back. The name, typed in Russian, was Katerina Krasnovic, and was followed by what seemed to be a serial number, probably a dossier file number. Below the name was a list of figures in kilograms and centimeters, the girl's measurements, and a paragraph which Gould could not make out, probably a description of identifying features. He looked at the photograph again, then unfolded the slip of paper. It was an interdepartmental note paper with the letterhead of the Hotel Europa in the Republic's capital, confirming a reservation, through the C.I.G.A., for two at the Gritti Palace Hotel, Venice, in the name Budin. The date of the commencement of the reservation was 9 July, the next day's date. A note in a space provided at the bottom of the paper mentioned that the reservation had been made and confirmed by telephone, and was signed with a flourishing initial.

These two were going to Venice, Gould thought. And this job on the girl was probably a side issue, to be accomplished before departing. If they were what they seemed, they were Russian gunmen. Then why the reservation in Venice, and why the photograph of Krasnovic's daughter? Was she there? And was she the one who had placed the call to the Ministry of the Interior, fingering Gould for Bainbridge's murder? Ashukian mentioned a Russian accent. The Prime Minister's daughter would speak the language without accent. In any case, Gould concluded, Venice was definitely the next stop.

He leaned out of the car and looked up into the lightening sky. He had heard the thin coming and going of a single airplane engine. The girl, too, was searching the

sky. He could not find the source of the sound, and leaned back into the car. He removed the photograph and the hotel reservation confirmation slip and replaced the billfold. The only other thing he found on the second man was in the side coat pocket, a spare loaded pistol magazine. He checked the pistol still held in the dead hand. This was not a Tokarev, but a Swiss service automatic, the SP47-8. Perhaps, Gould thought. Some of them are adapted to 7.65 calibre cartridges. He stripped two cartridges from the spare magazine and held the lighter up to examine them. They were the familiar bottlenecked 7.65 Lugers. He could use them in his Mauser. He placed the stripped cartridges together with the rest of the spare magazine in his coat pocket, then, looking down again, decided to take the pistol as well. He took the large square pistol from the dead fingers and tucked it into his belt, then leaned back out of the car. The girl was standing near the open door of the Tatra.

"I heard the sound of a small airplane before," she said.

Gould nodded.

"You know, Zarov was not in the car," she added.

"Their papers said their names were Kranek and Budin. One of them might be Zarov."

"No."

"You didn't see the man who was slumped forward over the wheel."

"I did not have to," she said. "Zarov has no hair on his head."

Gould did not say anything. He watched the girl as she reached into the car and brought out her purse, and a long stole of the same material as the dress. She threw the stole over her arm and opened the purse, reaching into it and looking up at him and smiling dimly.

The sky was lighter now, showing rose-colored traces in the east, through the trees.

"Do you have your papers?" Gould asked her.

She looked up from the small mirrored compact. "Yes," she said.

"Good. Let's go. It can't be too far to the border control."

"We are going to make a very chic picture walking into

the frontier control with the sunrise," the girl said. She smiled broadly at the thought.

She was truly beautiful, Gould thought, then laughed at what she had just said.

"You laugh very nicely, Bart Gould," she said. "Where do we go now?"

"Venezia."

"Pourquoi Venise?"

He showed her the photograph.

"Bainbridge's girl," Monique said. "She is in Venice?"

"I think so. Also, there is a telephone call I have to find out about."

The girl shrugged. "The Citroen," she said. "It carries Italian license plates. Perhaps from Venice. Maybe it would be better if we do not go there."

"They're from Trieste. And we must go there."

"If it will help." She smoothed her dress and threw the stole over her shoulders.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "I would offer you my jacket, but I am wearing a pistol."

"You are wearing more than one pistol," she said, looking at the sagging pockets of his coat.

He took out the Tokarev, examined it, and threw it far off into the woods. He slid out the magazine of the Swiss automatic, checked the number of rounds remaining and replaced the magazine.

"Put this in your purse," he said.

She shook her head. "The control will search us."

"No, they won't."

She opened her purse and he placed the pistol deep inside, beneath her papers and the other things she had there. Then he stripped the remaining cartridges from the spare magazine, and took out his Mauser. He withdrew the magazine and loaded it, sliding it back and drawing the slide back, listening as it ran forward, engaging the top cartridge. Then he snapped on the safety and replaced the pistol in his holster.

The girl watched the entire operation of loading the pistol without speaking. Gould looked at the empty Swiss magazine in his hand and threw it into the woods. Then they turned and began to walk along the road to the

north, the girl walking close to Gould but carefully avoiding any contact. They walked for a time in silence, and Gould watched the sky brighten through the trees. He did not look at the girl. Suddenly, as they walked, the girl caught her heel and lost her footing. Gould reached out and caught her as she began to fall. He raised her, holding her gently about the waist, the cool smooth fabric of her dress thin and delicate beneath his fingers. As he held her, her whole body relaxed against him all at once, and she was crying.

He placed her head against his shoulder and touched her hair, smoothing it gently until her spasm of sobs began to subside. They stood there on the road like that for a time, Gould's fingers suddenly sensitive and cool as they held the girl's waist, and after a time she turned her head and looked up at him.

"I was terribly frightened while they were chasing us," she said. "I must talk when I am frightened, and I remember I told you things about myself. I hope you did not hear what I was saying."

"I wasn't listening," Gould said.

She stood away from him then, and breathed deeply. The nipples of her breasts were risen against the fabric of her dress in the cool morning air, and Gould felt a thickening in his throat as he looked at the girl. She drew the stole close about her shoulders, and looked up at the sky.

Then, after a time, she smiled at him. "I am all right now," she said.

"Good," he said. "When we get across the frontier, we'll get someone to drive us into Petrovac and have breakfast. Then we'll get you some clothes, and a sensible pair of shoes."

"You do not like my shoes?"

"I love them."

"Then why sensible shoes, Gould? We are not walking to Venice, are we?"

He laughed. "No. I just thought you look a trifle *soigné* for the daytime in Yugoslavia."

"*Soigné* yourself," she said. "And there are no decent shops in Petrovac, anyway. I have been there."

"What can we get you, then?"

"Breakfast will do," she said and smiled. "And there is

a hotel near the sea. I can sleep for two days, I think."

He laughed and took her hand. They walked along the road without speaking now, and after half an hour, when the sky was fully light with the new morning sun, they saw the road barrier painted in black and white diagonal stripes, and the small building of the frontier control. As they approached the building along the road, they heard the high thin sound of the single airplane engine again, then a small high winged monoplane came in low over the road from the sea, swooped up and turned, coming in low over them again, and rose, climbing in a slow turn to the east and disappeared.

Gould and the girl stopped on the road and looked at each other silently for a time, then turned and walked up to the small building that housed the frontier control officers of the Republic. They entered the building just as the sunlight broke through the high trees. Gould could still hear, far in the distance, the thin sound of the monoplane as it flew away toward the east.

Chapter Five

JUST BEYOND the ancient walls of the coastal city of Dubrovnik, the beaches of Ploce stretch out along Sumartin Bay. The beaches are deserted during the second week of July, the celebrations of Fighter's Day, July 4, being over and the general populace returning to a normal pattern of life. The tourism along the Dalmatian coast is very heavy, but the steady procession of Germans, Italians, Austrians and a few English do not appear to be a sunbathing or swimming set, so with few exceptions, the beaches of the bay are not much used, except on holiday. Bart Gould sat easily on the soft white sand, propped up on his elbows, and watched the retreating figure of Monique Clermont as she walked down to the light surf. The girl wore a very brief white sharkskin two-piece swimsuit and Gould followed the smooth movement of her hips and her long legs as she walked. She moved steadily until she reached the water's edge. Once there, she stopped, placed her hands on her elegant hips, and studied the water. After a moment, she turned, looked back up the beach and waved to him. He raised a hand to wave back, then watched as she shook her hair out and ran lightly into the water, raising her arms and diving cleanly into a low breaking wave. She stopped, adjusted the top of her swimsuit, looked back at Gould once more, then stretched out on the water and began to swim with slow even strokes, her feet kicking rapidly in short movements.

Gould lit a cigarette, an Italian Nazionale, and turned to watch the road that ran parallel to the beach, following the curve of Sumartin Bay. They had reached Dubrovnik before noon, in the ancient Opel taxicab that the border official in Uleinj had arranged for them. The driver was a cousin to the border man, and Gould came under the immediate affection and protection of the border officer and his cousin. Traveler's visas were ar-

ranged immediately for Gould and the girl, and the cousin came to the frontier in his Opel and drove them into Petrovac, where their breakfast had consisted of two plates each of *djuvec,* a roasted preparation of eggplant, rice and meat sprinkled with grated cheese. The girl had been dreaming of croissants, or other sweet rolls, and coffee. The *djuvec* had proven a very satisfactory if not quite breakfast-like substitute. There had also been Turkish coffee, heavy and sweet, and hard to down in the morning, and then the three-hour drive up the coast to Dubrovnik over some of the worst roads Gould had ever seen.

Getting out of the Republic had been something else. In the end Gould had placed a call through to the Ministry of the Interior, had had them trace Ashukian and found him at his home. The Republic frontier control officer had taken the phone then, and a long argumentative conversation had taken place, the guard shouting in Macedonian, which Gould did not understand. Finally, Ashukian had asked to speak to Gould again. Gould told him about the affair with the Citroen, and the small single-engine plane.

"How do you go to Venezia?" Ashukian had asked.

"I thought to hire a car and drive to Belgrade," Gould said. "Catch the Simplon."

"No. The roads through to Belgrade are the most miserable cow tracks in the world. Who knows, maybe you find another Citroen following you that way. Also, they seem to be keeping track of you. The train will be carefully watched. Stay where there are many people. You say the girl was in your car last night?"

"Yes."

"She is very pretty, Gould."

"Yes, very."

Gould held the phone tightly to his ear. The girl was standing very close beside him as he spoke with Ashukian.

"Her name is Monique Clermont," Ashukian said. "There is no record on her, here. On Krasnovic, the Prime Minister's daughter, the picture you find is interesting."

"Why?"

"The Prime Minister released a short statement for the newspapers that his daughter left the Republic yester-

day for a short vacation abroad. Her itinerary includes Italy, but not Venezia. She stops with friends in Sestri Levante, the statement says. Also, Krasnovic, himself, goes north in three days. Inspection tour."

Sestri Levante was a small town on the Italian Riviera near Santa Margherita, Gould thought. That's a hell of a far cry from Venice.

"Oh," Gould said. "Well, we'll see."

"Yes. Listen, Gould, this is how you should go to Venice. Drive either to Kotor, or to Dubrovnik and take one of the express tourist boats. It is a nice ride, and plenty tourists. Nothing happens to you. Also, a night with the girl. What color are her eyes, Gould?"

"Gray," Gould said. "What the hell difference does that make?"

Ashukian laughed. "You know the color of her eyes already. Bad sign. Anyway, you know Dubrovnik? Where do you stay, there?"

"We're not staying anyplace," Gould said. "I want to get to Venice."

"Of course, of course. You stop for lunch maybe, anyway. Go to hotel Argentina, *20 Supila*. Excellent food. Fast boat to Venezia stop in Dubrovnik in the early evening. Don't take slow boat."

"Why?"

"Too many stops," Ashukian told him. "You will reach Venezia half day faster with fast boat."

"Can't we fly?"

"You know YAT planes, Gould? I would sooner jump off a mountain. No, take the fast boat from Dubrovnik. I have spoken with Giorgio Coradi. He will expect you."

"Thanks," Gould said. "And thanks for helping out with this border man."

"Civil servants who are stationed far from a capital city are always unbearable people, Gould. You have my sympathy. Give him a thousand dinar Yugoslav. It will make him a very flexible Macedonian. By the way, where did you get the second pistol? Did the girl carry it?"

"No. I took it from one of our friends."

"All right. Have a fine time. The Dalmatian coast is a wonderland in July. Great for boar hunting." He laughed then. "If you find yourself being followed, make sure it is

not an OZNA man before you shoot him. Tito does not like his secret police people geing killed."

"I know," Gould said.

The Yugoslav border man's cousin got them to Dubrovnik in the Opel and they reserved two cabins on the evening fast boat for Venice, using the service provided by the reservations desk of the Argentina hotel. They had lunch at the hotel, and three bottles of a good local red wine, which tasted faintly like a slightly sweet valpolicela. The meal, followed by a shower, seemed to eliminate the tiredness of the long night, and the girl had slept during the car ride up from the frontier.

"I must buy several things," the girl had said. "You want to come with me?"

They had taken a room at the Argentina, and would check out in time for the boat.

"Don't let the holiday atmosphere deceive you, Monique," Gould said. "We aren't tourists."

The girl stood in the doorway to the bathroom draped in a large bath towel.

"That is still no excuse for me to go about naked," she said. "I must get certain things. Did you see the way the *maître d'hôtel* was looking at me in the dining room?"

"I was too busy looking at you myself," he said. There was a slight thickness in his voice as he sat on the bed watching the girl.

She crossed the room to him slowly, the towel opening slightly as she walked. She sat on the bed and smiled.

"I can't spend the rest of my life in that dress, you know."

"Emilio Pucci wouldn't mind," he said. "You're the best advertisement I've ever seen for his clothes."

"No matter," she said. "There should be some luggage when we register at the Gritti Palace."

Her gray eyes were not flat now, he thought. They were deep and bright and her mouth was wide and sensuous, her lips relaxed and soft. Her eyes were looking into his, seeming to know what he was suddenly thinking by just looking at him. She smiled warmly.

"You will have to come with me," she said softly, still smiling. "I do not speak Slovene."

Gould raised his hands and rubbed his eyes. They had begun to burn. The tiredness was returning. He felt her hand on his and took them away from his eyes. The girl's face was inches away from his, her eyes deep and burning, her lips not smiling now. He bent forward slightly and placed his lips against hers, his arms holding her, the towel falling away from her shoulders as she lay back on the pillow and he felt her body move close against his, the gentle movement of her hips as they pressed forward. His hand closed over her right breast, the nipple rising pointed and hard under his fingers. He felt a pounding in his ears as the girl's mouth moved against his, her body straining tight against him, and suddenly their movement stopped. His head moved back and he saw her eyes, flat suddenly, looking into his. He quickly rolled off the bed and slipped the Mauser from the holster that was now hung over the back of a chair.

The door latch clicked a second time as he crossed the room in his bare feet. He watched the door handle as he stopped there, the pistol extended in his hand, the safety snapped off, waiting. They waited, unmoving like that, for a full minute, but heard no other sound. Finally, Gould's hand closed over the door knob. He turned to see the girl, once again covered with the towel, sitting rigidly at the edge of the bed, watching him. He signaled to her with his hand, indicating that she get down. He waited until she was on the floor, on the far side of the bed. Then he gripped the pistol tightly and threw the door back open.

There was nobody there. He leaned out into the corridor carefully, listening for any sound on the polished tile floor. Silence.

He closed the door quietly and turned the key in the latch, then turned to face the girl.

"I think you're right," he said. "We'd better go shopping. Or where there are people about."

"Who was that?" the girl asked.

"It may have been an OZNA man," Gould told her. "Or one of our friends."

"I am sorry," the girl said softly, but, Gould noticed, she was breathing rapidly.

"We had better get out of here. And stay out of doors all day."

So they had gone shopping. The hotel was in the same street where, it seemed, all the fashionable shops were located. Gould waited on the street as the girl went into a shop to make her first purchase. When she came out, she looked at him and smiled.

"How do you like?" she asked.

"I liked you better without it," he said.

"So did every man in Dubrovnik," she said. He took the small package she was carrying.

"Where now?"

"There is a shop that carries everything. Down this avenue and across a square."

The girl seemed to know exactly where she was going, so Gould let her lead him. They walked rapidly along in the narrow street, staying out toward the curb, and he looked carefully along both sides of the street as they walked, trying to note anyone who might be following them. They reached the shop the girl had remembered without seeing anything.

"Come with me this time," she said.

"Do you need any money?"

Her face stiffened for a moment. "No," she said, and turned to enter the shop. He looked over his shoulder once more, then followed her in.

It was the type of exclusive shop Gould had seen on every fashionable street in every cosmopolitan city of the world, Madison Avenue in New York, the Rue Faubourg St. Honoré in Paris or Via Tournabuoni in Florence. The places were always run by a *modiste* who strongly urged every client to believe that she had assumed the noble lineage of her finest customers. Gould did not care for the patronizing air these women bore, and the one in this shop was no exception.

As each garment was shown them, the girl looked first at Gould before she offered an opinion. They exchanged glances, forming with facial expressions silent opinions of each outfit. This annoyed the *modiste,* and thereby pleased Gould immensely. She was also annoyed at his ability to recognize an outfit as being the work of a par-

ticular couturier, an ability, however, which delighted Monique Clermont. The girl, at Gould's urging, finally decided on a lightweight Chanel suit, a black silk Balenciaga dress with white organdy collar and cuffs and a straight pleated skirt which shaped itself very sensuously over the girl's hips.

Two pairs of shoes, Ferragamos, seemed to complete the purchases. Then the girl spotted the swimsuit.

"That is a way to stay out among people today," she said.

"Good idea," Gould said, and the swimsuit was added to the lot. While the girl went to the dressing room to check the fit of the clothes, Gould walked to the street window and looked out. There was a man standing on the opposite side of the street, out at the curb, looking across into the shop.

Nobody could be that obvious, unless he wants me to know he is following us. As Gould watched the man, he turned and looked directly into the shop, through the window, catching Gould's eye and staring at him steadily.

The pressure treatment. They want me to know they're counting my hours. I wonder why? They had Bainbridge set up to kill Krasnovic, then killed him themselves. And Krasnovic issues a release that his daughter is on a holiday abroad, and I find her photograph in the pocket of a Russian killer. They are after her, too. Everybody that had anything to do with Bainbridge.

"They are all perfect," he heard the girl say behind him.

He turned, and smiled. "Fine," he said. "Take the swimsuit and have the rest sent round to the hotel. What is the bill?"

"I've paid it," she said.

They left the shop and walked back to the hotel, stopping once to buy a piece of luggage, a bathing suit for Gould and several shirts. When they left the leather goods shop, Gould checked and saw the same man still with them. He did not mention it to the girl.

They hired a taxi to drive them to the beach; at the least deserted area Gould had the driver stop.

"How will we get back to the hotel?" Monique asked.

"We'll have the driver wait for us."

"Oh, Bart, I will never be able to relax with a taxi meter going the whole time."

He laughed. "It can be fun, believe me."

He spoke to the driver, who looked at him strangely, then shrugged and nodded very patronizingly, placed his cap on the car seat next to him, and went to sleep.

Gould looked up along the road as he sat on the beach now, seeing the parked taxicab, the driver inside still sleeping, and, about a hundred yards back along the road, a man sitting low in the back of a second taxicab. He smiled to himself. He should come down on the beach and sit close by us, he thought, giving us the evil eye. They are not going to do anything here. They would have done it already. I will try to lose him when we leave for the boat. There may not be much point to trying, but I would rather not have one of them on the boat with us. Not for a day and a half.

The girl came up the beach from the water, the wet suit clinging to her body and her hair flat down along the sides of her face and trailing to her shoulders. She stood over Gould, rubbing herself briskly with a large striped towel that matched the colors of the arabian tent-like cabana they had rented to change in.

"There is too much sun," she said. "Even after a week on a yacht."

"We had better be getting back, anyway."

She reached down, held his wrist and looked at his wrist watch.

"It is only sixteen hundred hours," she said.

"Yes, but the boat is due here in three hours. I think we should have dinner at the hotel. The food on those ships is pretty bad."

"Yes, I know. For the stomachs of the cane cutters from the mouths of the Po who have never worn shoes. I will change first."

She looked down at her hands and brushed the sand from them. Then she rose and went into the striped tent and changed, and they drove back to town. Not letting the girl see what he was doing, Gould turned and looked back as he lit cigarettes for both of them. The other cab was close behind them.

They had a very silent dinner in the hotel dining room,

then had their bag carried out and placed in the front of a taxi.

"The airport near Foča," Gould told the driver loudly.

The cab drew away from the curb and turned east, away from the harbor, heading toward the hills that led up to the small airport that served the YAT planes to Belgrade and Zagreb. Gould looked back. Another cab was close behind them. They drove through a crowded market area, and, as they turned a corner, Gould ordered the driver to stop, and hurried the girl out after himself, reaching in and giving the driver two thousand dinars and telling him to continue on to the airport. He lifted out the bag, and rushed the girl up on the sidewalk and into a doorway. The cab took off, and shortly afterward, the second taxicab turned the corner and continued after the first. Gould could see, in the second cab, the same man who had been following them all day. The use of taxicabs had convinced him this was not the OZNA. The state police always used their own cars.

"Who was that?" the girl asked him.

"One of Zarov's men, I think. He has been following us all day."

"You did not tell me."

"Why should you worry as well as me? Come, Monique, let's buy a bottle of *slivovic* and get another cab down to the harbor. We'll miss the boat."

They rode down the hill and out through the city walls in another taxi, arriving at the dock barely three minutes before the small coastwise steamer was to set sail. In the flurry of comings and goings of passengers, they did not see the man standing at the rail studying them as they came aboard. He was a large heavy-faced man who wore thick eyeglasses, a dirty raincoat, despite the warm clear weather, and a stained brown hat with the brim turned down. Nothing but the man's eyes moved as he stood at the rail. He had boarded the ship in Kotor, and in the right side pocket of his raincoat, which had been enlarged and deepened to more than twenty inches, he carried an MP 42 Russian service sub-machinegun with a folding stock. The detached magazine, which he carried in his left pocket, held a capacity of twenty five rounds of 7.62 soft-nosed military issue ammunition.

Chapter Six

THE MOTOR ship Mariana di Ravenna was of Italian registry out of her home port of Trieste. She had been built in 1926, had an overall length of three hundred fiftysix feet, and her gross register tonnage was 2,550. She was one of the express passenger cruisers making the run between Venice and Uleinj, Yugoslavia, with brief stopovers for taking on and disembarking passengers and light freight at Kotor, Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, Rijeka and Trieste. She had been making this run twice weekly since entering service in the early spring of 1927, except during the period from 1940 to mid-1945, when she had been commandeered by the German government for cargo and mail transport to various ports along the Adriatic coast. During the war years, she had been subject to one air attack by a flight of six Sicilian-based P-47s returning from a bomber escort mission. The replacement of certain sections of her bridge deck and several metal patches on her lone stack were the sole remaining evidence of her "combat" experience. The cessation of hostilities in 1945 had found her abandoned in the small port of Piran, Yugoslavia, having been ingloriously decommissioned from her service to the Third Reich who had last used her twenty-knot maximum speed to withdraw a large contingent of the headquarters constabulary of the Belgrade garrison of the *Geheime Staats Polizei,* during the overall retreat of the Wermacht from Greece through the Balkans. Upon taking leave of the ship in Piran, the Germans had stripped her of her instruments and such other portable luxuries as appealed to them. But their booty had eventually fallen into the hands of a Morrocan battalion of the Free French Forces fighting north along the Venetian plain, who had taken the entire Belgrade Gestapo headquarters contingent prisoners and executed them on the spot.

It was at a table in the dining saloon next to that oc-

cupied by two OZNA men that Bart Gould and the girl, Monique Clermont, were seated for dinner the first evening aboard the Marina di Ravenna after she weighed anchor from Dubrovnik.

The small experience with the taxicab and their combined reactions to their cabins had a somewhat dampening effect on their spirits. Gould, also, was now in the depth of a reaction to the town they had just left. He had very deep memories of the town, having spent two weeks of an earlier summer there with a girl who later died in an airplane crash. The pain caused him by the memory of this girl was something that Gould's mind fought constantly to avoid. Her death had ended his marriage plans, and begun the somewhat dubious reputation he now enjoyed in Washington, D.C. circles, as a sportsman adventurer whose valuable life was being rapidly, if discriminatingly, funneled away in a river of dissipation. There were only two men in the world who knew his true purpose in being here now, and neither would ever acknowledge it openly. A big part of his job, for that matter, was to see that neither of these men would ever be confronted with the necessity of choice in acknowledgement.

And what, Gould thought now, as he looked across the table into the lovely slanted gray eyes of Monique Clermont, had he achieved thus far to warrant the trust of the two men's confidence? He had achieved little more than an assumption. He had searched Philip Bainbridge's room, and from what he had found, had *assumed* that Bainbridge was planning to assassinate Krasnovic. His plan to fight fire with fire had never materialized. Someone, the Russians he once again *assumed,* had killed Bainbridge for him. Yet, someplace in the meaninglessness of Bainbridge's death, he, Gould, must figure. Perhaps his appearance in the Republic had caused the death of Bainbridge. This was not likely, he thought, but once again, it was an assumed possibility. But how? There was the telephone call from Venice, of course. If Gould could be securely convicted of Bainbridge's death, and then this followed up by the revelation of the Zurich account in Krasnovic's name, all this, together, handed to the proper newspapers in Rome and Paris, not to mention Belgrade, Athens or even Tirana, Albania, could create a

world of limitless speculation as to how the United States dealt with the ministers of minor countries with whom she was allied, and whose treasuries she kept replete with financial aid. They even destroyed their own agents in a confused moment. It could ruin Krasnovic surely, and our position, perhaps irretrievably. But why had the Russians changed their minds about killing Krasnovic, he wondered. And what of the photograph of Katernia Krasnovic?

He toyed with the food which had been set before him by a sweating steward, and looked at the girl's plate. She, also, had not eaten a thing.

"I am glad we ate in the hotel," she said.

"Yes," he said, smiling suddenly, "but think of tomorrow. We don't reach Venice until tomorrow night."

She laughed. "Then I fast, and drink the bottle of *slivovic*."

"You'll be some shipmate," he said.

"There are depths in me you have not yet thought to tap, Mr. Bart Gould," she said.

He looked into her eyes and was suddenly consumed with a physical hunger for her. His throat felt dry, and his legs beneath the table brushed the whispery sheen of her nylon stockings, causing his nerve endings to tingle. He reached across the table and touched her hand. She placed her other hand over his and held it there, and there was suddenly no place else in the world, and no problems, no fears, no questions, only the hunger he felt and recognized easily in the touch of her fingers. Their hands remained closed over each other on the table and, as if by silent mutual agreement, both turned to look out the large porthole next to them, gazing past the railing of the promenade deck at the moonlit rocky coast. They watched as the precipitous coast glided slowly past them, the high rocks dropping straight down toward the water, disappearing into a blackness of the night shadow, and somehow, despite its bleakness, the scene aroused a wonderfully warm feeling, perhaps enhancing their desire for isolation, their hunger for this sudden world of their own to continue unabated, beyond the physical confines of their little table on the ship. He turned slowly and looked at the girl. She was wearing a suit this evening, the simple

opening of the jacket spread slightly, revealing a soft glow of the elegant cleft between her jutting breasts, and just the trace of a line of white lace as it plunged diagonally toward the center, disappearing behind the closing of the jacket.

He turned briefly at the rise of a sudden burst of loud talk at one of the large communal tables in the dining saloon. The storm of voices subsided in a riot of laughter and Gould saw a large bottle of wine being passed around the table. He then became conscious of a low conversation at the table next to him. Two men were speaking Slovene, mouthing their words around huge mouthfuls of food. He heard something obscene said in reference to a girl in the dining saloon, then realized the object of discussion was Monique. A wave of anger flared through him at the thought of any reference, evil or good, to this girl whom he suddenly regarded as his very personal property.

The second man laughed, and their conversation drifted. Gould could not stop listening to them now, waiting for a further comment which would inflame him to cavalier action. What he heard, however, registered only slowly, set his mind racing back, until he was brought out of it by the girl, whose hand he had begun to hold so tightly that it hurt her.

He looked at her, mumbled an apology, but otherwise remained silent. He tried a smile, but it didn't work. The spell was broken for the girl as well as for himself. She smiled back politely and continued to look out the window, while Gould's mind raced.

The two men had begun to discuss their luck, this trip, in the fact that the north of the country, Yugoslavia, was to be practically devoid of any secret police for the next five days. Their manner of discussion of the secret police made it obvious, to Gould, that they were speaking of their fellow workers. This fact registered, and was followed by a smile as he heard their conversation, realizing that these two were involved in some smuggling operation and were happy they would not be subjected to the scrutiny of their own numbers in Koper, the Yugoslav border point. Then the conversation turned to the reason for the

OZNA being gone from the north. The southern sections of the country, all the way to the Albanian border, as well as that part of the border that touched the *Republic,* was being made into a securely lined avenue for travel. The President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of National Defense, Josip Broz Tito, was going to be traveling south this week. The purpose of the trip was unknown to the two men, who, from their talk, could really not have cared less. Someone in Zagreb had mentioned something about meetings designed toward a Federation of Balkan States, whatever that might amount to.

This second fact registered, Gould's mind sought back for the thing that had caused him to register this knowledge. Then it came to him. Ashukian's telephone conversation. The Prime Minister had released an item about his daughter leaving on a holiday, and that he, the Minister, was traveling to the north of the country in three day's time. Was there something to tie together here? Tito traveling south, with no official communiqué issued, and the entire secret state police alerted, and Krasnovic traveling north on an alleged inspection trip. This perhaps was a reason for the Russians changing their minds about the assassination. But, once again, why kill Bainbridge and finger him, Gould? And why the elaborate mechanism of following him, and the attempt on the road the night before? And the single-engine airplane, that was surely part of it. Well, he had thrown them off here, he thought. Maybe. He found small consolation in the memory of the second taxicab chasing the first one east away from Dubrovnik.

The steward removed their dinner plates with no comment. He was used to this criticism of the fare on board, particularly by the first-class passengers. A dessert, exotically labeled *Macedonia* on the menu, was set before them. This consisted of small bowls of cut-up slices of fresh fruit, liberally doused in a brandy which Gould estimated from its aroma to be available for about seventy-five cents a gallon. Blessedly, there was some marvelous cheese served with dry crusts of bread along with the black coffee. Having finally reached a course that appealed to them, Gould had the steward bring more of the

cheese, and inquired as to the availability of a decent wine. The steward confided that there was on board a giant *fiasco* of royal quality valpolicella. Gould ordered some of the wine. It turned out to be quite as the steward had claimed, but a trifle tainted by sediment.

"It gets beaten about on the ship," Gould explained to the girl. "Doesn't sit still long enough for the sediment to stay at the bottom."

"It is marvelous wine," she said. "My demands to extremity do not run to drink. I do not drink for taste, unfortunately. Good wines are wasted on me."

"Why do you drink, then?"

"It makes the world smaller. It lets me think the way I want to, at any given time. I could easily lose myself on this ship, for twentyfour hours, with that bottle of slivovic. I do not want to think what comes after this."

"Why?"

"*Tiens,* why you ask. We arrive in Venice, and follow the porter when we get off the lighter from the ship near San Giorgio Maggiore to the Riva degli Schiavone, all the way through the pretty streets and bridges and *piazzi* to the hotel. Then, perhaps two days, or three, we fight and you discreetly give me money to take a train to Paris. There is a change in Milan, you know that?"

"You don't think very much of me, do you?" he asked.

"There is a reason to why you do this that goes beyond protecting me. It is myself I do not think much of."

He held her hand tightly across the table and smiled.

She smiled back. "Now you think to yourself, 'Here is this girl, very good to look at, perhaps, who is a victim of the horrible circumstances of a world of selfish men and feminine weakness.' That is not the truth, Gould."

"I wasn't thinking that," he said.

"It does you credit, then," she said. "The truth is actually quite pathetic, and so very melodramatic. I was married, you know. To a journalist of the disposition we know as left of center. He was recalled to his regiment when the trouble came up in Algeria. He was killed there, quelling a drunken row between two Germans of the *Legion Étranger,* in Sidi Bel Abbes. His effects were returned to me by one of his fellow officers, who came to my

apartment in *Passy* with two bottles of *Cordon Rouge 1953,* helped me drown my grief in the wine, and then proceeded to seduce me as he spoke sorrowfully of my dead husband. I am a fallen woman, no?"

Gould did not say anything.

"It is two years, now, since the wake with my husband's fellow officer, and I have never begun to care again. Who knows, perhaps there is progress. I have never told this to anyone but you. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

They both looked up at the sounds of chairs scraping on the floor behind them. The OZNA men were leaving the dining saloon. Gould turned back to the girl. She was smiling brightly again.

"Have you ever thought that perhaps you really do not owe anything to the past?" Gould asked her seriously. "That's what is killing the present for you, you know. Not to mention the future."

"Perhaps. And perhaps I have grown accustomed to the present. It is not a difficult life, if you can close off certain bulkheads inside yourself."

"That's a good recipe for dying, Monique."

"Enough talk, then. You are no one to speak of recipes for dying. We are more alike than you may care to think about."

Gould looked at her for a long time without speaking. Finally, she broke the silence.

"On the beach in Ploce, I studied your body," she said. "What are the scars?"

Gould smiled. "The one on my chest," he said, "from the war. The legs got that way in two places, Rheims, and under the ocean near Yucatan. First, a Grand Prix Ferrari, then a shark." He laughed, then. "There is a mark on my hip from a rhinoceros who charged better than I fired a full magazine of a Springfield rifle once, in Kenya. You haven't seen that one."

"You will show it to me later," she said softly, and the tingling sensation returned between their held hands.

"But I am right, Gould," she said. "The difference between us is that my scars do not show when I wear a swimsuit. Only when I am in the wrong company too long."

"And what kind of company is that?"

"This is the first time, so I am not sure, she told him. "The company, I believe, of a man whom I think I could love."

They left the table shortly after this, not speaking, but holding hands as they walked, their shoulders touching slightly as they went through the double hatchway that led from the dining saloon to the promenade deck.

The deck was nearly deserted as they stood there, leaning lightly on the rail, letting their bodies just touch one another, and watching the coast glide by. Gould's arm slowly went around the girl's waist, holding her tightly against him, and for the moment they had forgotten their decision to stay in places where there were people about.

Chapter Seven

THE SHIP was making excellent speed, at least her boasted twenty knots, and perhaps, Gould thought, a bit better. The sea was flat, almost unbroken in the moonlight, and the only disturbance to its surface was the long ripple thrown out from the cleanly surging bow, and the white turning wake that recorded the ship's trail. They were in among the coastal islands now, coming up through the Hvarski Kanal between the long islands of Hvar and Brač. Standing at the rail of the promenade deck with the girl, he had seen the lights of Bol on the northern island, and then, turning and looking back, through the double glass of the portholes through the saloon and out the other side, the glow in the sky of the lights of Stari Grad. They stayed on the promenade deck all through the passage up the canal, then watched the ship veer sharply into the small passage around past Milna, cutting close in along the deep channel that ran up against the western island of Šolta. The island coasts were almost continual cliff-like precipices, dropping down clear to the water, sharp lights and darks in the bright moonlight, with occasional rock outcroppings reaching out over the water, the spill of the ship's wake smashing and hollowing in under the rock faces and causing momentary flashes of luminescence. Then the water spread out open, flat again, as the surface of a lake in dead calm, and across the broad expanse of the Brački Kanal, they could see the lights of Split.

It was not a night for sleeping, and Gould together with the girl revelled in the magnificence of the night around them, and in the unmentioned, even unthought-about anticipation of what few hours would pass between them in whichever of their cabins the time and the night would eventually choose for them. They had decided to let the evening ride as it would.

Occasional deck strollers passed at their backs as they

stood at the rail, and Gould now decided that they had lost the Russian with the small gambit of changing taxicabs in Dubrovnik.

They stood at the rail all through the docking and departure from Split, watching first the lights of the city grow larger, and despite the lateness of the night, so seemingly bright, after the monotone darkness of the sea. They watched the few passengers debark who did, and with more than a casual air, Gould appraised each passenger who got aboard.

The first was a couple with folding bicycles slung over their backs. They wore identical chamois cotton pants and shirts, and Italian open-cut sandals over yellow socks. Germans, he thought. They were followed by a procession of men in baggy pants and striped vests, all of whom wore brightly crocheted skull caps and carried rope-tied paper parcels. There were several mountain people, the men and women dressed in black, carrying children slung at their sides, and wearing cloth boots. Farmers, he thought, from near Sinj or Brnaze. There were few shipping officials or dock workers, and Gould noted, only one policeman. There were no "unobtrusive" looking civilians standing on the dock, or boarding. The "unobtrusive" types who usually stood out like Santa Claus, because of their almost military uniformity of dress, trench coats over their arms, pin-striped double-breasted suits, black ties, black slouch hats, and the inevitable pencil-thin moustaches, the not so secret secret police of anyplace. The two men in the saloon had obviously been right. The OZNA had moved south in force to pave a clear path among the people for Tito, wherever he was going.

After the ship moved out of the waters around Split, Gould knew there was a passage between the mainland and the twin islands of Mali Drvenik and Veliki Drvenik, then a swing around north, hugging the coast as they began to pass among the hundreds of small rocky islands up to Zadar. It was a long run and they would not reach Zadar before morning. The moon was already low in the sky, when the Marina di Ravenna heeled to port as the helmsman took her into a fifty or sixty-degree starboard turn and up past Rogoznica into the run among

the islands. Gould and the girl left the almost deserted promenade deck and climbed up to the forward narrow deck just behind the bridge.

In the green glow of the compass light, they could see the helmsman and a bridge officer standing in the wheelhouse of the bridge. The faces of one or the other of the two men occasionally glowed orange as they inhaled on the cigarettes they seemed to be constantly smoking. It was very quiet and under the constant vibration from the ship's engines below going at full speed, they could hear only the sounds of the water, washing out from the bow or churning softly back under the stern. Gould and the girl stood in the shadow of the wheelhouse on the bridge deck, and when the ship heeled slightly, beginning the pattern of weaves as they entered the island area, Gould felt the girl's weight move against him and he placed his arms around her as her head tilted back. He felt her lips open against his, a light sigh escape as he pressed her tightly to him, and the slight sexual rhythm of her body as it moved against him. When the ship turned again, the shadows moved away and they were once again in the full moonlight.

"The world has stopped, Gould," the girl said softly.

"No, Monique. It is just beginning to move again. For the first time in years."

"I would like to think so," she said, just as he squeezed her hand to quiet her. She felt his grip, suddenly rigid and without the gentleness of the past hours, and the flatness passed across her eyes again in understanding of what he meant. The ship was starting into a turn again, the bows noisily awash now, and the girl felt Gould's face against the side of her head as they began to pass into the blackness of night shadow once more.

"When we are completely in shadow," she heard him whisper, "get down on the deck. There is a low winch just behind you. Get down and get behind it. As flat as you can."

"What is it?" she asked him.

"Quiet."

His hand was in his jacket again, touching the Mauser, and muffling the snapping sound of the safety by slipping it down under the coat. He listened carefully, as they

moved into shadow, hearing the sound again now, the sickening oily metallic snicks of an automatic weapon bolt being drawn and slid home. An automatic carbine, he thought. Or a sub-machinegun. He thought, in that instant, that the first sounds he had heard may have been a folding stock being snapped into place.

Before the ship turned the corner back into the moonlight, he and the girl were flat on the deck behind the winch. An additional piece of luck was a high air-intake tube which stood between where they now lay and the one stairway up to this aft quarter of the bridge deck. Whoever was there was still on the stairs or at their foot on the deck below. The sound of the gun had carried a long way in the still night. The ship executed a minor turn again, and again they fell into shadow. Turning slightly and looking out through the rail, Gould saw they were well into a vast group of small rock islands. There would be many turns now, and many changes in the way the light fell. The waves, sliding out from under the bow, were crashing against the stone cliffs of the islands loudly and often now, and Gould felt the light salt spray on his face and in his hair. He could hear the girl breathing beside him. They lay behind the winch and waited, Gould watching the stairway and listening to the sharp slapping of the bow spill striking among the rocky outcroppings of the small islands. The Mauser felt cool and heavy in his right hand. The ship was moving at full speed, weaving accurately between the small islands, up past the clear green lighted channel markers, and as they lay on the deck waiting, they felt their bodies shift slightly adjusting their balance with every heel of the ship.

In the moonlight, a shape suddenly showed, coming up the stairwell to the bridge deck. Gould waited. This could be a bridge relief or perhaps another unsleeping passenger, and their precautions would have been nothing more than the nervousness they had been fighting to conceal from each other through the entire night.

Then Gould could see enough to distinguish a man's hat, somewhat misshapen, its brim down all around, and the top of a man's face. A short flicker of reflected moonlight revealed that the man wore glasses. Now his entire head showed, a heavy full shapeless face in the moonlight.

Gould reached down slowly, finding a small coin in his trouser pocket. He held the coin in his left hand and continued to wait. There was little doubt in his mind now. The figure was coming up too slowly to be an idle passenger or a crewman. He felt his heart pounding wildly, seeming to hear the pulse beats in his ear, feeling in an instant of illogic that his pulse could be heard all over the bridge deck.

The figure rose up fully in that instant, and Gould caught a dull reflection off the heavy vented barrel casing of the sub-machinegun in the man's hands. He was an immense man, but he was quiet. His head did not move, but Gould knew his eyes were searching the constantly moving shadows of the bridge deck. He held the gun poised at his hip. Now, Gould thought. He moved the wrist of his left hand in a quick flipping motion, tossing the coin to the far side of the deck, hoping the man would not see any reflected light from the coin, but only hear it fall.

He heard the tinkle as the coin struck the deck, and immediately the gun in the big man's hands swung around and began to fire. The orange flames from the sub-machinegun's barrel moved, and the explosions tore at Gould's ears. He heard the smashing of glass above him and a sudden outcry. Bullets lashed the deck, tearing and splintering the wood, and Gould rose suddenly to one knee, the Mauser coming up level with his eye in the one smooth movement and his right finger was squeezing the trigger. The pistol jumped with the recoil, then again and a third time, as the sound of the sub-machinegun broke off suddenly and Gould saw the heavy man stagger back, the gun dropping from his hands, as he reached out with a dying hand to break his fall backward off the bridge deck.

The girl cried softly beside him, but Gould did not feel right. The ship was cruising too loosely, and as he rose to turn to the wheelhouse, he was thrown back down on top of the girl as the shrieking sound came to their ears of metal tearing and slamming. The ship bumped, shook herself in her forward heavy movement and slid again. And again they heard the sheering sounds as plates began to rend from the starboard hull. The ship moved

again, slower now, and then, with a final agonizing screech of crunching metal, stopped moving forward and began to settle on her starboard side.

Gould stood and helped the girl up, both standing at an angle now as the ship already showed her starboard list. Their nostrils recoiled at the sharp odor of burnt cordite and they turned to look into the wheelhouse. The windows were all smashed, and the walls below were punctured with clean black circles. Within, the green compass light still burned, but they could not see either of the two figures who had stood there before. Gould rushed to the hatch of the wheelhouse and looked in. The helmsman and the uniformed officer both lay on the floor, their bodies crumpled and twisted and still. There was a jarring, and a further scraping and the ship settled steeper on her starboard side. Gould rushed out to Monique. She was kneeling on the deck, her balance lost as the ship had jarred and settled deeper.

She looked up at him and blinked her eyes.

"They're dead. Nobody was steering the ship for half a minute and she ran up on a rock at full speed. She tore the bottom out of her starboard side. She's going down fast."

The girl shook her head and said nothing.

"Come on, Monique," Gould urged. "We've got to get out of here. There may be others of them." He looked up suddenly, over the rail. There were the lights of a town on the mainland, perhaps three miles away. But the town was up the coast. It could be no more than a mile to shore.

"Can you swim a mile?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think so."

There were the sounds of panic below, now, and screeching sounds as the boats began to be hoisted out on davits to be lowered to the water. Gould ran to the starboard rail. The boats hung in the starboard davits were almost sitting on the water, and suddenly, from below, a voice coming loud over a power megaphone began shouting orders in Slovene, then repeating the same thing in Macedonian, and again, in a third language, Serbo-Croat, Gould thought.

"We've got to swim for it," Gould said. "We can't go

below. There may be another one, just at the bottom of that stairway waiting for us. Come on."

He took off his jacket and spread it out on the deck.

"Take your clothes off and lay them on my jacket," he said. "I'll make a packet of them and perhaps we'll manage to get them to shore with us."

The girl hesitated a moment, then began to follow suit. She quickly stripped off her suit jacket and skirt, stepped out of her half slip, took off her shoes and stockings and stood there waiting, in her brassiere and pants, as Gould, himself, stripped to his shorts, wrapped the bundle of their clothes rapidly and bound it tightly with the jacket sleeves. He had buried the Mauser deep in the clothes.

The ship slipped lower then, and they could hear the people below begin to scream, and over the sounds of the screaming, the rapid boiling of water spilling in great amounts. There was a sudden deafening hissing sound. The boilers are flooding, he thought. He finished the packet and slung one arm through it, up to his shoulder, moving the shoulder to settle it. It was heavier than he thought it would be. Then he remembered the girl's purse was also in the packet. She was still carrying the Swiss pistol, which together with his own Mauser, brought the weight of the packet well up over three pounds, not counting their clothes and shoes. This would be quite a swim. They went to the starboard rail. They looked down and could see the water, no more than fifteen feet below them. They saw one of the ship's boats being rowed away rapidly from the scene. There were no more than three people in the boat.

The girl looked at the deck below and began to scream. Gould grasped her shoulders and shook her gently. She quieted and looked into his eyes.

"You go first," he told her. "When you hit the water, stay where you are. I'll come down right near you and we'll make for the shore together."

"The people," she said loudly. "The others, Gould. They'll drown."

"No, they won't. They can practically step off onto the rocks that tore the bottom of this ship. They'll be all right. We can't stay here, though. They will be looking

for us among the survivors. We've got to get to the mainland. Now, go."

She turned to the rail, but he stopped her by placing his hand on her arm. She stopped and turned to him. He smiled grimly and kissed her very firmly on the mouth. Then he nodded.

She climbed over the rail and held herself to its outside for a moment, then turning once to look at him, she dropped out and down into the water. He saw her body strike the water. She had coiled herself tightly as she fell so as to hit safely. He waited until she surfaced, seeing her look up toward him, as he jumped out from the rail, feeling the packet of clothes bump against his back as he fell. He jackknifed his legs, grasping his shins with his arms and ducking his head as he struck the water. The coldness shocked him for an instant, but he was instantly back on the surface.

"Monique," he called out.

"Here, Bart," the girl said quietly. She was not two feet from where he had surfaced.

"All right. Let's go. If you tire, tell me, and I'll help you along. And for God's sake, stay close to me. Don't let me get ahead. If you see me moving ahead, stop me."

She nodded and they both moved away from the sounds of escaping steam and the screams still coming from the decks of the ship. They eased into steady swimming strokes, Gould using a one arm stroke, never raising his arms from the water, keeping the packet of clothes high on his surfaced shoulder to prevent drag. The girl swam easily beside him, not struggling to speed, but stroking slowly and regularly, keeping the better part of her strength in reserve. She is a swimmer, all right, Gould thought.

As they swam, the sounds of hissing steam stopped, but they could still hear the screams echoing over the water. They stopped to look back once, seeing the rows of lights of the ship all at a raked angle now and light colored patches on the rock island. The passengers were being transfered to the rocks. Several boats were on the water, moving in around the ship. Gould wondered if they had found the man with the sub-machinegun. He and the girl looked at one another and turned and con-

tinued to swim toward the mainland. They swam slowly and steadily for a long time without looking back, the girl's breathing quite audible now as her exhaustion began to mount. At first, Gould slowed his pace so she could stay up with him, but soon, he could tell by her thrashing that she was finished. He stopped, told her to roll over in a float on her back and relax. She obeyed silently. He unslung the packet and placed her arms through the knotted sleeves, the packet resting on her chest just below the water, and now he swam heavily, tired from the coldness of the water and the distance they had covered already, his left hand resting lightly under the girl's chin, holding her face above water as she kicked to propel them and help him. They stopped several times to rest, treading water and holding each other closely. Once, just as they stopped, they heard the distant voices rise up suddenly and looked around back at the ship. She was sliding off the rocks, the scraping and tearing sounds coming to them again, and a great mass of bubbling noises vibrating through the water onto them.

The Marina di Ravenna went down in less than half a minute after she broke loose of the rocks, and Gould and Monique watched the geysers of water rise high out of the sea in the place where the ship had slipped beneath the surface. After a time, they did not say anything, but turned and began to swim again. The girl tired in a very short while, and they once again assumed the position of she floating on her back and holding the packet of their clothes and he swimming and towing her.

His arms had begun to pain him, and now each time he stroked or kicked, sharp aches of exhaustion fought to keep him from completing each stroke. He raised his head to breathe only every fifth or sixth stroke now, and each time he did, he felt he could go no further. But each time, he forced himself to go the five strokes until the next breath. Then it was four strokes before the next breath. Then three, and finally, two. He stopped and looked at the girl, seeing her breathing and clutching desperately to the packet of clothes. She was no longer kicking to help their progress, and his own kicks were hardly more than acknowledgements that he knew of

the technique of kicking while swimming to aid in one's propulsion. When he knew he could go no further, he urged his body on at each stroke. They had swum at least two miles, now, he thought. It had been more than the one mile he had figured. You misjudge distance over water, Gould, he told himself. Things always seem closer than they are. But I know this, and I automatically account for it. But not in the dark, Gould. Not in the dark.

The sky began to show a grayness now, on this, the third day he had gone without sleeping, and then he heard the gentle lapping of a light surf striking the shore. The sound brought a new surge of strength, a reserve he did not believe his body capable of. The girl heard the sound and stopped him.

"Gould," she said, coughing. "I think we are near shore. I think we have made it."

"Yes," was all he could say, and he tentatively let his legs down in the water to see if they would come to rest. His foot struck a rock, and he felt a sharp pain shoot through him. He sought the rock again carefully, and using it to rest against, pushed hard and stroked several times more, towing the girl and feeling her kicking desperately. Then he lowered his legs again. They touched a sandy bottom.

"You can stand," he said very slowly, placing his hand under the girl's back as she lowered her body and touched the surface sand beneath her feet. He took the packet from her and, leaning on each other very heavily, the water running off their bodies, they made their way the last few yards to the shore. They fell to their knees once out of the water, and in the gray light of morning, Gould spotted a low overhanging rock at the back edge of the narrow sandy beach. He helped the girl up to the rock and lowered her to the ground. He then went back to the water's edge for their packet. When he got back to the rock, the girl was collapsed into a deep sleep. He undid the sopping packet, spread the clothes out on the ground under the rock and lay down close to the girl. He was asleep almost at once.

Chapter Eight

A FEELING of intense heat along his left leg woke him, and he knew immediately where he was. His eyes blinked open and he saw the side of the girl's face, close to his. Her body was curled tightly against him as they lay on the sand. She was still asleep. He raised his head slowly, seeing his left leg extended out from under the rock overhang into the sunlight. He drew it up in the shadow, then moved his arm from around the girl's waist and looked at his watch. It was shortly past two o'clock. He moved carefully away from the girl as she slept, easing his right arm out from under her head. She breathed deeply and he saw her eyes move beneath the closed lids. Her lips moved slightly in a trace of a smile, and then she relaxed once more into sleep. His eyes traced the length of her body, in the tight almost transparent lingerie she wore, and a momentary flicker of sensual hunger passed through him. He was roused suddenly at the distant sound of a motor, a sputtering sound coming from a great distance. He sat up fully, looked around at the sand and at the pile of their clothes, spread open where he had placed them. They were in full sunlight. He went to where the clothes were, feeling them and finding them just slightly damp, almost completely dry. He stood up in the sunlight and looked out over the water. A face of rock came down to the water on the left and cut off his view out to the rocky island where the ship had struck. He looked back at where the girl lay, then made his way down to the water, wading into the gentle surf almost to his knees before he could see past the rock face.

The rock island from which he and the girl had swum to shore was at least two and a half miles out, he saw now. There were several small boats out there, and many dots of color along the drab gray of the rocks. As he watched, a small boat, driven by an outboard motor,

came into view from behind the rock on his left, heading out to the scene of the wreck. Of the motorship Marina di Ravenna nothing was to be seen. He sprinkled some water on his face, then turned and went back up the beach to where the girl slept.

Moving quietly, he spread the clothes out on the sand, flattening them with his hands to remove at least some of the wrinkles. The shoes were dry and stiff, but the clothes had not fared too badly. He emptied the contents of the girl's purse on a flat stone. Her papers, all contained in a flat alligator billfold, were wet but otherwise intact. He noted that there was practically no money left in the billfold. The girl had used everything she had to pay for the clothes. The Swiss pistol was still wet, but showed no signs of rust. His own Mauser was in the same condition, wet but apparently not yet rusting. He checked the contents of his own passport case, then spread the papers and money, the folded letter of credit, the passport, all out on a flat rock with small stones to hold them down. From the pocket of his trousers, he extracted a handkerchief and lay that flat on the sand. It would be dry in no time.

He was suddenly very hungry, and remembered that they had not eaten since the evening before, on the ship, some eighteen hours. Then he thought about where they must be. He remembered the ship had turned past the point of Rogoznica and come up into the channel between the small islands. They had seen the lights of a town. It must have been Vodice, or Sibenik. Vodice, most probably, since Sibenik was in from the coast on a small bay. But it was the larger city and they could get out of here best through there. He estimated the distance between where they were now and Trieste at about three hundred seventy-five kilometers, and silently cursed the policeman Ashukian for advising they go by sea. They would have been no less safe driving to Belgrade and taking the Orient Express to Venice, or even flying with the Yugoslav Air Transport. Yes, he thought, but we are still alive, and you don't know if you would be if you had gone some other way. Yes, and you are still almost two hundred and seventy-five miles from Venice.

And they are going to very great lengths to keep me

from getting there, he thought. I can't see why. He sorted his thoughts carefully and came away feeling only that the Russians' attempts to keep him and the girl from reaching Venice made it more important now than he knew to get there. Suddenly, and incomprehensibly, the entire key to everything lay, in his mind, in reaching Venice. At least there, he thought, there is someone to use, if Ashukian's friend Coradi is what I have been led to believe he is. Yes.

He decided to let the girl sleep a while longer so that he could have time to examine the guns more closely. He chose a flat stone near the rock overhang where she was sleeping,. then brought both pistols and the hankerchief, which was now dry, and sat down crosslegged by the stone. He withdrew the Mauser magazine, and drew back the slide to eject the chambered cartridge. The action worked cleanly. He removed the remaining cartridges from the magazine, then slid it back into the pistol and stripped it rapidly, cocking the hammer, turning the safety down, pressing the slide release button in the trigger guard and lifting the slide off. He removed the barrel and used the dry handkerchief to clean the bore, then wiped the internal parts as well as he could and quickly reassembled the gun. He stripped and cleaned the Swiss pistol next, taking longer with this gun because of his unfamiliarity with it. He wiped the cartridges dry, and fed a full clip of eight into the Mauser. There were five left, and he put them in the Swiss magazine. He dry-fired both pistols once or twice. The actions seemed to be working perfectly. Then he drew back the slide on each in turn, allowing a cartridge to be jacked up into the chambers and letting the slides run home. He snapped on the safety of each gun and lay them down on the clean stone. Then he woke the girl.

She looked up quickly as he touched her, her eyes frightened, as if not recognizing him. He smiled and her eyes softened, then turned down and she quickly sought to cover herself with her arms.

"Where are we?"

"On a beach," he told her. "We came out of the sea with the dawn. And you look like Venus, rising from the surf."

"Botticelli's painting?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Botticelli's Venus was not wearing a Chanel suit."

"Neither are you."

The girl blushed deeply, then her face blanked as if only now did she remember what had happened.

"We swam from the boat," she said.

"Yes. It was at least two and a half miles. You, my lovely, are all right."

"The clothes?"

"They're just about dry, and hardly the worse for wear," he said, laughing. "Vanity before safety."

"No," she said. "Respectability before sacrifice."

He laughed again, then nodded to the clothes.

"What happened to the ship?" she asked.

"She sank. I think they got everybody off all right. Except our friend with the machinegun, of course."

The girl sat up and hugged her shoulders a moment. She sniffled, then turned her eyebrows inquisitively. "I am not sick," she said.

"We're lucky it's July."

"Yes," she said. "Very lucky."

She ran her hands through her hair, smoothing it and shaking her head. She suddenly looked more beautiful, Gould thought, than at any time since he had met her. And that, my boy, he said to himself, takes one hell of a woman.

"I am hungry," she said. "We should have eaten that swill on the boat."

"I guess so."

"Have you looked in my purse?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, his eyes suddenly narrowed.

"My lip rouge has run all over everything, no?"

His eyes relaxed. "I didn't look in your cosmetics."

She nodded, then rose, moved her shoulders, and looked at the clothes spread on the sand.

"They seem to be all right," she said, purposely avoiding his eyes. He knew she was embarrassed by her state of undress, and watched as she tried to hide it by kneeling and examining her clothes.

"I never owned a Chanel suit before," she said. "Look at it."

"We'll get you a dozen more," he said.

"I like this one."

She stepped into her half slip without looking around at him, then the skirt of the suit and the jacket. They looked creased, but fine otherwise.

"The jacket is still damp," she said. "Can one go down to the water?"

He nodded, and watched her walk down the beach, enter the water ankle deep and wash her face. As she walked back up to him, she buttoned the jacket of her suit. She then kneeled carefully by the stone on which he had spread the contents of her purse. She opened a small cosmetic bag, set a mirror against it, and took out a tortoise-shell comb and began to run it through her hair. Suddenly she looked up at Gould.

"We still go to Venice?"

He nodded.

"Gould, why do we not get a boat, a small one this time, and cross to Italy? To Pescara or San Benedetto, and we can go to Rome. Let us forget Venice."

"If you want," he said, "I'll put you on a boat across to Italy. I've got to get to Venice. Perhaps you'll be safer away from all this. It's not a bad idea."

The girl looked at him for a moment, then turned back to the mirror and continued combing her hair, until she was satisfied.

"No," she said, finally. "I go with you. We are both mad, but I go with you anyway. How do we get there? Where are we now?"

He dressed as he explained to her where they were and that they must get to Sibenik. "Our best bet is to get one of the coastal busses up to Trieste."

"L'autobus?" she said. "To Trieste? My God, Gould, we will be dead from the driving. You know the roads in this wretched country."

"It's the safest way, Monique. We'll be among people the whole way, and nothing can happen."

"Yes, like on the ship, nothing can happen."

"It's that, or get to Zadar and wait for another boat. Or, make our way to Zagreb and get a train. I don't know about flying in this country."

"No more boats, Gould."

He smiled, "All right, that's out. Now, Zagreb is almost as far as Trieste. I'm not hiring any cars around here. I'm not sure of the interior roads and we could spend a week finding our way. We'd probably have to go back to Split to get a plane, and it isn't worth the chance. No, I'm afraid it's the bus."

"If you insist."

"You can still go to Italy, Monique. I'll get you a boat, and you can cross over to Pescara and be in Rome by tomorrow morning."

She shook her head. "I don't like Rome. Look, I told you. My lip rouge is ruined."

"You look marvelous just the way you are."

"Like a scrubbed kitchen floor. Not chic."

"You'll start a new fashion with no make-up," he said. He thought she did look truly beautiful as she was, her hair combed straight and the full color of her face showing without any make-up or coloring on her lips.

"Yes, a new fashion," she said. "On the bus to Trieste?"

"No better place to start a new fashion," he said. "Don't put on your shoes until we get to a road. Let's go."

The girl examined her stockings, which were shredded, and rolled them up and buried them in the sand. Then she replaced all the things in her purse and Gould gave her the Swiss pistol.

"Why do I carry this?" she said. "I couldn't shoot it if I had to, even with the instruction you gave me. Didn't the water ruin it?"

"I cleaned it. You carry it, if for nothing else than ballast. You never know."

"Never know what?"

"I couldn't tell you."

They carried their shoes as they climbed up from the sand along an inclined level of rock, coming out on a low cliff over the sea. They looked back, seeing the islands where the ship had gone down and the small boats still hovering out there. Then they turned and walked through a thin wooded area until they reached a road. It was empty. They sat on a rock and put on their shoes, then began to follow the road east, away from the sea, toward Sibenik.

"I am very hungry, Gould," the girl said, as they walked.

"Good. Just don't start dreaming about *croissants* and marmalade again. The fare is a bit more gamey in Yugoslavia."

The girl laughed and they walked down the road together to the town of Sibenik.

The town was very busy with the activity of the aftermath of the wreck of the Marina di Ravenna. They saw several old covered trucks with Red Crosses on their sides, in the small town square, and with the activity around them, their appearance aroused no reaction. They had a meal in a small café across from where Gould learned the through busses stopped. It was very hot in the town, and when the bus arrived, heading north, they were glad to get on despite the crowd. It was dark before the bus reached Benkovac, and most of the passengers got off. The long run, up the coast to Rojeka was cool in the night, and uneventful. There were not many passengers on the bus and after they had eaten a parcel of food which Gould had had prepared during the stop in Benkovac, a combination of ground meat, onions and rice, rolled in cabbage leaves and called *smarma,* and drunk two bottles of a local wine that tasted slightly resinous but good, the girl slept against Gould's shoulder as the bus lumbered along the hilly coast road.

They changed busses in Rojeka and the run across the Istrian peninsula was a fast one. It was morning when they stopped at the small town of Hrpelje for the border control. Gould had hidden the two pistols in the bus seats during the night, and they passed the control with no difficulties. They went through the farce of Italian passport control at the border, declaring a great amount of American money, and buying a carton of American cigarettes from one of the border officials, a man who obviously turned a substantial profit from confiscated goods. When they arrived in Trieste, the girl wanted to buy several things but Gould refused to allow any shopping extravaganzas. They took a taxicab from the bus terminal down to the harbor road to the *Grand Hotel et de la Ville.* They took a small suite, so they could

bathe and rest, and have an address to arrange for a car to be hired.

Gould left the girl at the hotel, locking her in the room, and took a taxi to the *via del Teatro,* where he knew the offices of the *Automobile Club d'Italia* to be. He arranged for the hire of a fast car (he requested and was able to get a Mercedes 300 SLR), and learned that for a nominal charge he could surrender the car at the Piazzale Roma in Venice. The car would be driven around to the hotel in about two hours. Could they not arrange for faster delivery? he inquired. No, Signor, that would be impossible. Gould realized it would take them that long to check his credit, probably. He had gone to the club himself, rather than risk a third party listening to him had he telephoned from the hotel. Two hours it would have to be, then. He signed a check for the car hire and left.

Returning to the hotel, he had the taxicab stop at a small shop on the *Riva 3 Novembre,* the harbor line road on which the hotel was located. Completing his purchase at the elegant little salon, he had the cab follow him along the road and stopped twice more before returning to the hotel, once at a sporting goods store where he obtained a box of fifty rounds of 7.65-calibre cartridges, and at another shop, to purchase another piece of luggage, into which he put the small square box of pistol cartridges. Some baggage, he thought.

When he returned to the hotel, he unlocked the door to the suite. Monique was on the bed in the bedroom, covered with a large bath towel, still damp from her bath.

She sat up, holding the towel against herself as he came in.

"You bought another bag," she said, smiling.

"Yes. If we keep this relationship going, we'd better get a truck to follow us with new sets of wardrobes. I've arranged for a car. It will be here in two hours."

"And I have a surprise for you, Bart," she said.

"Oh?"

"Only a small surprise. I did not want to go out, since you told me not to, so I was forced to rely on the manager's taste. I'm glad I decided on something very in-

significant—I can imagine how his taste must run to large things."

"What are you talking about?"

"I had decided not to give it to you, once I saw it. But you really can use it, despite its being not so *chic.*"

She brought a box up from under the bed and held it out to him.

"I had to have my suit steamed," she said. "So the thought came to me, and I spoke to the manager. When I explained, and he had to open the door from the outside, he was somewhat surprised. I told him you do not trust me and always lock me in."

There was a shirt in the box, and a necktie. The shirt was shiny white silk, with a white embroidered pattern, two-button cuffs and a long pointed collar. The tie was the most garishly colored one Gould had ever seen.

He looked at the girl and they both started laughing.

"The manager assured me they were of the finest Italian manufacture," she said.

"If I put these on, I'll look like I lend money at thirty percent interest, and carry a machinegun when I go on my collection rounds."

"I'm sorry, Bart."

He put the suitcase on the bed and took the small package from his side pocket and handed it to the girl. She looked at the small package and then up at him. She tore the wrappings away hurriedly and opened the clasp of the small oblong box. It was a solid gold lipstick tube, set with three small rubies.

"I couldn't have you arrive in Venice with your morale all shot to pieces over not having your lip rouge," he told her.

She unscrewed the cap of the tube, holding the tube away and examining the almost colorless pink shade of the cosmetic.

"You think that is my color?" she said.

"It was the closest thing I could find to no color at all. You really don't need any, you know."

She twisted the base of the tube so the stick of color rose, and she applied it lightly to her lips, not using a mirror, but doing a perfect job.

"Good?"

"Couldn't be better."

She smiled and got off the bed, covering herself with the towel and stepping to the mirror to examine her lips with the coloring applied.

"Pas mal," she said softly, and turned to face Gould. "Very elegant. I don't know what to say."

She looked at herself again, and examined the fine workmanship of the jeweled gold tube. As she stood there, the towel slipped from about her, and Gould looked at her silently, seeing her body now for the first time. Before this, he had seen her in the various stages of undress, and had reacted to the erotic nakedness the covered parts of her body had aroused in him. Now, seeing her completely nude, he marveled at the beauty of her body, and his hunger was suddenly of a different sort, a slow building desire that went far beneath the surface of physical passion.

The girl looked at him, then down at the towel which had fallen to the floor, and suddenly she seemed to lose the modesty and self-consciousness she had felt before. Also gone, suddenly, were the traces of guilt she had felt at the knowledge of what he knew of her. She came to him, her legs suddenly weak under her, and moved her body close against his as he held her to him.

He could feel her body trembling, as his hands caressed her back lightly.

"Yes, darling," she whispered in his ear. "Everything. Now, please."

He kissed her gently, feeling her beautiful lips part against his and the sudden rush with which a passion engulfed their bodies. As he held her, his hands caressing her breasts, the nipples risen suddenly to hard points, he felt her hands removing his clothes, her fingers touching him, holding him.

He lifted her gently and kissed her again, placing her on the bed and seeing her hands brush all the wrappings and the bag to the floor as her eyes opened suddenly, seeing him, her body moving against his, his arms holding her and her eyes closed slowly as his lips touched her body.

Chapter Nine

THE COUNTRY WAS flat and the roads fast as they drove up along the sea from Trieste through to Monfalcone, then cutting inland, crossing the Isonzo on a stone bridge. Gould let the big Mercedes engine out flat for the long straight run past Cervignano to the bridge that crossed the Tagliamento into Latisana. The day was hot, but driving fast in the powerful car, with the top down, the airstream whipped in and Gould saw the girl's eyes narrowed and the ends of her hair, out from under the scarf she had tied round her head, streaming back in the wind. She looked at him and smiled.

He slowed the car as they passed through Latisana, and then there was a stretch of flat farm country. They were not speaking as they drove, each bound in their own thoughts of the hours behind them, and, Gould reflected soberly, the hours ahead. He was not at all sure of what they would find at the hotel, but he did not delude himself as to there being no danger, nor any trouble. He was sorry now, suddenly, that he had not left the girl in Trieste. Sorry, while at the same time glad she was here beside him. It was a peculiar selfishness, he felt, that bordered on ignorant cruelty. But, beneath it all, he did not really care. What was ahead, would be there, and he would handle it as it came. And he could think for two, and act for two, and he had never played it safe so far in his life, and now was no time to begin. He suddenly realized that he felt better now than he had in years, and the thought brought the other girl back to him and his mind stopped thinking. He turned it off and concentrated on the road ahead.

They came through San Dona di Piave and across another bridge after the last of the town, and the canals began to border the road. Then the road came down very close to the lagoon, and looking out across the water as they drove, he saw the topmost towers of Venice,

Giotto's campanile, away beyond the islands, Torcello and Murano, and, although knowing what he was driving toward, his heart began to beat fast for the beauty of the city they were coming to. I've never had that city all to itself, he thought. There has always been something, the trouble last time, and now this. And perhaps the things that have clouded it are the things that have really made it so beautiful. I've always been tied to something, when I've been here.

"Venise," he heard the girl say and turned, seeing her pointing in the direction he had been looking. He smiled and took her hand, the one she pointed with, and held it tightly.

He released her hand as the road turned away from the water again, and they drove on to Mestre where the road turns left onto the long bridge over the lagoon. There were many boats on the lagoon and tied in along the canals, and they heard the whipping sound of a train slowing for the fast stop at Mestre as it came off the bridge, having just left Venice. There are ways, he thought, in which I wish we were on that train now, leaving this place. It's a marvelous place, but not for me this time. And I had better remember that very fast.

He slowed the car, the disc brakes screeching in the last of the slowing, as they came off the bridge and followed the turn leading up to the big factory-like building that was the Pizzale Roma. He turned the car into the blackened ramp, and the screeching of the brakes echoed suddenly, hollow inside the walls of the giant garage. He stopped near the office with the red and white sign of the *Automobile Club d'Italia,* and turned off the ignition of the car. He looked at his watch. They had made the run up from Trieste in just under two hours. Counting turns and bridges, that was pretty damn fast, he thought, and patted the side of the car affectionately. The girl got out at her side, and he took their bag from the back. A man in a white coat came out with a clipboard. Gould handed him the papers, and the man walked around the car, then came up to him smiling. They each had to sign a paper, and that was over. He carried the bag, and with the girl at his side, walked

out and down to the embarcadero and they were in Venice.

There were many gondolas tied in along the embarcadero, moving high and light on the water. Across the Grand Canal, they could see the broad stone steps leading down from the railroad station to the Fondamento Santa Lucia. There were more gondolas there, and a *vaporetto,* just moving away from its floating station dock and passing under the high arched bridge.

A *portere* took the bag from Gould, looking at him strangely as he hefted the bag because of its almost total lack of weight. Apprising Gould and the girl to be more affluent than to be using either the vaporetto or a gondola, he led them down a long ramp to where a row of the small, brightly varnished motor launches were tied in. A sharp looking, lean Italian wearing a ship's officer's cap came up to them, tipped his cap, his eyes raking the girl from head to toe, and smiling at Gould.

"How much to the Gritti Palace?" Gould asked him.

"Due mille cinque cento, Signor," the man said.

Gould nodded silently, tipped the *portere,* then tipped the man who held the gunwale of the launch with a long gaff and offered a hand in unnecessary assistance as they stepped down. The small engine of the launch fired up and a line was tossed aboard, and the launch moved easily out into the Grand Canal.

The boatman was making to the center of the Canal, but Gould told him to take the faster way. The man shrugged, and turned the boat under a bridge of the Fondamento near the Piazzale and moved smoothly down the back canal into the Rio Novo, then the Rio Ca' Foscari, and then out into the broad Grand Canal, having avoided its long bend northeast through the city and around and back southwest. As they came out into the broad canal, they looked away to the left and could see the sharply angled, heavy-looking *Ponte di Rialto,* crossing the canal at the heart of the city, and Gould remembered the markets and the small store where another girl had bought sandals in another time. It was another life, he thought, and held Monique's hand tightly, as the launch swung into the canal traffic and

came down under the Accademia bridge, with the Palazzo Loredan on the right. The air was bright and a cool breeze played out over the water, and Gould wondered if their arrival in the city was known and if they were being followed. He had not told the girl that this was what he expected, and that he was purposely making no attempt at concealment in the effort to bring something out in the open.

He watched the buildings along the walks of the canal, and the other boats near them in the canal traffic, but saw nothing. The girl was inhaling everything with the heart of a true tourist, smiling broadly at the beauty of the place. He was glad she was thinking of the city and not what the city might contain for them. He was definitely sorry now that he had brought her here. It was an unnecessary hazard, and having the girl with him would make everything he did additionally difficult, with her to think about. The sights of the buildings, instead of the open fields through which they had driven while we had thought about it before, suddenly brought him to the realization that what would face them was not something to stick someone else's neck into. Nothing could be hidden, he had thought, while on the road. Here, in the gothic crevices and hidden windows and narrow streets, his feelings were something else entirely.

They passed the two-man gondola ferry that operated just west of the hotel, and the launch moved out of the center of the canal and coasted up to the small dock of the Gritti Palace. A uniformed bellboy took the line the boatman threw onto the dock, and a tall man in a cutaway coat and striped trousers came out of the hotel entrance and out to the dock to greet them. Gould helped the girl up out of the boat, then paid the boatman and climbed up himself.

With the girl leading, and Gould behind, the assistant manager followed them into the hotel. Gould had noted with amusement the bellboy's reaction to the empty suitcase and his exchange of glances with the boatman. The boatman had shrugged, then smiled a knowing smile and gunned the engine of his launch. There were several loungers at tables on the restaurant terrace, but beyond the normal curiosity aroused by any new arrival at a

small hotel, they did not seem to take much notice. Inside the hotel, they passed the bar on the left and Gould saw a man sitting on one of the high stools talking with the barman. The man's eyes flicked strangely as Gould looked at him. Good, Gould thought. Somebody knows we're here now. As he and the girl registered at the manager's desk beyond the revolving door of the street entrance, Gould noticed the man from the bar cross behind them and enter one of a short row of telephone booths. The machinery was starting, he thought.

The manager was terribly apologetic but since Signor Gould and the Signorina Clermont had placed no reservations in advance, there were but two small rooms available, not in the old palazzo, but in the new wing. These rooms, as a matter of fact, had been held in reservation, but the parties, expected that morning, had not arrived. It was actually fortunate, was it not?

Gould smiled grimly. "These two rooms," he said. "They were held in the names of two men named Kranek and Budin, were they not?"

The manager's eyes widened. "But, Signor, you are right. Were the two men acquaintances?"

"In a manner of speaking," Gould said. "They have been detained, unfortunately, and will probably not appear. They convey their regrets at not having notified you of the necessity to cancel their reservations."

The manager nodded, and signalled to a bellboy. *"Appartamenti 239, e 240,"* he instructed the bellboy.

Gould and the girl surrendered their passports, and instructed the bellboy to leave the suitcase in the girl's room. They turned and walked back to the bar. The man, Gould noticed, was talking excitedly into the telephone, glancing occasionally at him as he spoke. Gould took the girl's arm as they crossed back to the small club-like bar overlooking the canal.

"This is very elegant," the girl said. "Before, I have stayed at the Royal Danieli."

"This is quiet," Gould said. "And it's got the best bar in the world. Wait till we sit down before you look around, but the news is out that we're here."

The girl stiffened as they walked.

"It's nothing," Gould said. "There was a man in the

bar. When we came in, he went to the telephone. He's still talking."

They passed the concierge's desk, and Gould did not see the man he was looking for, the old thin-faced man who had lent him money once, years before, when he was stranded here, and the wires got all crossed and his credit had not arrived until the morning he left Venice. He later learned that the concierge had lent him his personal funds, and Gould had not forgotten. This was the man who would tell him anything there might be to tell. He asked at the desk, and was told that the concierge would return before half an hour. Gould requested that the man, a Signor Castioni, be informed that he, Gould, was awaiting him in the bar. Gould then walked with the girl into the bar, sitting at one of the tables against the canal-side wall, where they could watch the telephone booth. The barman smoothed his jacket and came out from behind the bar to where they were.

"I have always preferred this bar to any other," Gould said, "because it is not like a bar at all."

"It is so quiet," the girl said. "I wish there were more people here."

"Two gin and *Campari,*" he instructed the barman. "And make them with Gordon's."

The barman inclined his head and went away.

"I do not drink gin," Monique said.

"Order what you want, then, when the barman returns. I'll have them both."

"What is it, Bart?"

"Nothing," he said. "I'm sorry. Please, Monique. I've been thinking."

"I have been thinking, too, Gould. I think we should not stay here."

"We must."

"To be killed by the man at the telephone? Why? I am not one for sitting and, how do you say, taking it on the chin?"

"I do not say it," he said, and smiled. "I should have left you in Trieste."

"No."

"I've been thinking," he said. "Something has hap-

pened. None of our friends are here. They must have left one behind for the telephone. But otherwise, it is too quiet. I don't like it."

The barman came with the two drinks on a small silver tray.

"The *signorina* would like something else," Gould told him. "Leave the other drink here, though. What will you have, Monique?"

"I really want only coffee," she said.

"That is possible, *signorina,*" the barman said.

"With Strega," she told him, and smiled briefly.

The man in the telephone booth finished his conversation and stepped out of the booth. He looked at them briefly, then disappeared to the left. He's going, Gould thought. But somebody will be back. He sipped one of the two ice-cold drinks. It was perfect. Now for Castioni, he thought.

They heard the hissing sound of the coffee machine, and shortly afterward, the barman appeared with the coffee on a small tray, and a tall, extremely narrow pony glass of the liqueur the girl had ordered.

"This I remember from Harry's Bar," she said. "Always you end the night in Venice with coffee and *Strega* at Harry's Bar."

"This night hasn't even begun."

"I wish it was over," she said.

Gould had finished the first gin and *Campari,* and had decided that the second was no longer cold enough, when the man he was waiting for appeared in the entrance to the bar. He rose, smiling, and extended his hand as the concierge came toward them.

"Ciao, Signor Gould," the man said largely. "It has been too long."

"Ciao, Castioni."

The thin-faced man smiled and placed his hands at either side of Gould's arms, and looked deeply into his eyes. He looked down, and smiled politely to the girl.

"Signorina Clermont," Gould said. Castioni bowed and touched his lips to the girl's wrist. Then he straightened up and looked at Gould again.

"There was no word that you were coming," he said.

Gould nodded, then took out his billfold and extracted the photograph of Katerina Krasnovic. He passed it to the concierge.

"Is she a guest here?" he asked.

Castioni studied the photograph for no more than an instant, then looked at Gould and nodded. "She comes two days ago, with two men. Very barbaric types, like pictures of the men surrounding Lenin when he inspected factories. They stay in two adjoining rooms. The girl does not look very happy about anything."

"Are they still here?"

Castioni shook his head slightly. "Yesterday morning, one of the men comes down to the desk. His face is very red, very apoplectic, and he asks if the Signorina has gone out. I do not know, and tell him so. He looks at me very long time and say nothing then goes back to the elevator. The assistant concierge, who was on duty in the night, then tells me that the young lady went out for a walk before light, and has not yet come back. I call the room of the tractor lover and tell him what I have learned, and two minutes pass and they are both downstairs, and gone. They have not returned. Nor has the girl."

"You are sure?"

"Beyond a doubt. But tell me, Signor, what has this to do with you? You are not on holiday?"

"Yes," Gould said. "A holiday. But these people about whom I ask are friends. We are troubled at their absence."

"Friends," Castioni said noncommittally. "Of course. If there is anything I can do for the *signor,* or the *signorina,* please just say the word."

"One thing, Castioni," Gould said. "There was a man in the bar here, when we arrived. He is gone now."

Castioni frowned. "Thin, tall type. In a dark suit and with a straw hat and large dark glasses? He has been here constantly for two days now. I spoke to the management about him. There was a feeling among the staff that the establishment was being invaded by a *gigolo.* He is no guest, just sits at the bar and drinks *Cinzano.* To show you his type, Signor Gould, he drinks nothing but *Cinzano.*"

"It is very inexpensive," Gould said.

"Perhaps," Castioni said. "Certain investigations were begun by the management regarding this type of the large dark glasses, but nothing has been done to interfere with his presence. I do not know."

"He is gone now," Gould said.

"So I see, mercifully. Perhaps to some *trattoria* for some cheap food to soak up all the *Cinzano*. He does not eat a meal here. I would not allow him to be served if he sat in the *ristorante,* in any case. The old order, I fear, begins to pass, *Signor* Gould."

"*Sic transit gloria mundi,* Castioni," Gould said. "We have been supreme all too long. It becomes our time, soon."

"You think so?"

"No," Gould said, and both men laughed.

Gould's laugh was cut short suddenly as a man stopped in the doorway to the bar. He was tall, well-built, and fair-skinned, dressed in a white linen suit with a white shirt and a thin black tie. He held a Panama hat in his right hand, and as Gould watched, transferred the hat to his left hand, removed a pair of heavy framed dark glasses, placed them in the outside breast pocket of his jacket and slid his hand into his right side pocket. Gould stiffened, watching the man's face. His eyes were steel-gray and cold, his lips thin with a turned-down trace of cruelty about the corners. He was a good-looking man, Gould thought, but humorless. These impressions passed through Gould's mind in a brief instant, as the man stood there. The man's eyes flicked from Gould to the girl, and no reaction showed in his eye. His eyes returned to the girl and stayed on her for a long time. Gould breathed quietly and watched the man's hand in the side pocket, as his own moved to the opening of his jacket.

"Signor," Castioni said, in a manner of conclusion to the greeting. He inclined his head and bowed to the girl. *"Signorina."*

Gould glanced at him briefly, then turned his eyes back to the man in the white suit. He had not moved, seemingly waiting for something.

He's waiting for Castioni to go, Gould thought. But

certainly he cannot be planning anything now. And why not, Gould thought. They sank a ship without thinking twice. Why not break up a nice quiet elegant hotel? We should not have come here. He felt a moment of panic as Castioni retreated from the bar, brushing past the man in the white suit as if he was not there. The man turned his head for an instant, then looked back at Gould and the girl.

Gould was watching his right hand. His own hand was already on the Mauser. I hope it is not yet rusted tight, he thought. Now I will really need it to work fast, and now, of course, the little bastard will jam.

The man took a step forward.

"Signor Gould?" he said. His voice was level, cool, yet with a tone of cordiality.

Gould said nothing.

"Signorina Clermont?"

Gould heard the girl swallow audibly, as his hand grasped the stock of the Mauser and snapped off the safety.

The man stepped forward and smiled broadly. "Coradi," he said. "Giorgio Coradi. My man just telephoned that you had arrived. We were concerned. Ashukian learned of the sinking of the Marina di Ravenna, and was beside himself with guilt. We must telephone him at once."

Chapter Ten

"IT IS SIMPLE, and yet it is not so simple," Giorgio Coradi was saying. "The manner of the two men's leaving of the hotel makes it obvious the girl was being held a prisoner, and she escaped. But why hold someone prisoner in a place such as the Gritti?"

"Perhaps that is the way they look at it," Gould said. "To keep a prime minister's daughter prisoner is a touchy thing. But to do it at an elegant hotel is perhaps an attempt to mollify the prisoner, who, we assume is accustomed to certain luxuries."

Coradi shrugged doubtfully. "The important question, of course, is why she was held prisoner, do you not think so, *Signorina Clermont?*"

They were now sitting in the bar at the Gritti, Gould next to the girl, and Coradi sprawled luxuriously in a large wooden-armed chair, facing them. He had insisted they share a special wine with him, one of his favorites. The wine had turned out to be no more than sparkling *Lacrima Christi,* but Coradi was fanatical about its year.

"1955," he said. "That is the only year. They say it was bad, but what do these dolts from the Veneto know? The best year of any crop of any wine in all *Italia.* I purchase every case of the 1955 I can find. Here, perhaps, they will not sell me their stock. I drink here only, and at the *Bauer Gruenewald,* the only hotels with decent cellars in the whole city. *Royal Danieli,* all splash, and much *frou-frou* for the Americans, but their wines, *chianti ordinario para paisanos.* This, this is wine, no?"

He had forced bottle after bottle upon them. The wine, of course, was magnificent. But its effect on Gould and the girl was more anaesthetic than anything. After the release of tension caused by Coradi's appearance, and their fear of who he was, then followed by the realization that now, at last, they were among friends for the first time in days, their bodies and minds seemed to grasp

at any opportunity not to be involved in the problem they faced. Gould fought to stay awake and talk with Coradi. He already had his organization, which Gould came to realize was quite extensive, on the trail of Katerina Krasnovic. It was two hours later now, and they had been telephoned at the hotel twice, to learn that the girl had not left the city by either the railroad or by plane from the airport on the *Lido*. The city was being systematically searched by what Coradi implied was more than one hundred men with great talent for both finding things and taking care of themselves. So he insisted they banter, and drink champagne.

He put his glass down and looked from Gould to Monique. "You like the wine, *Signorina?*" he asked. "It must be only the best, if you are to drink it."

The girl smiled. "Thank you," she said. "It is amazing champagne."

Gould looked at her with a trace of annoyance.

"At any rate, *Signor* Gould," Coradi continued, "I was suggesting that we explore the possibilities as to why the Krasnovic woman was being held here. It is a very interesting situation. The daughter of the prime minister of the *Republic* being held captive by the Russians. And she to escape them. I will wager she is a woman to be dealt with, no? Tell me, *Signor* Gould, what do you know of Balkan politics?"

"No more than one is supposed to know, I guess."

"And that is?"

"Tito is on the fence, as usual. The *Republic* and Greece are with the west. Albania I am not sure, nor, I think is anybody. They call themselves communists, but Moscow doesn't quite agree. Bulgaria and Rumania are well over the hill."

"Simply said, but adequate," Coradi said, and nodded. "Now, look at the picture more closely. You have just been in the Republic, and effected a rather startling journey through Yugoslavia, from what you have told me. Did the *signorina* truly swim two miles and a half? That is more than four kilometres."

He whistled low in admiration.

The girl lowered her eyes and smiled, glancing briefly at Gould.

"As I was saying, you are familiar with the map of our part of the world." Coradi said, pouring more wine in their glasses. "The, what we know as, the Iron Curtain begins at about Lubeck, Germany, and extends down through that splendid country and on to the western border of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and then shifts east along the Hungarian border until we reach Rumania. From there it drops south to Bulgaria, then poof. No Greece, no Albania, no Republic, no Yugoslavia, meaning, in essence, no ports on the Mediterranean Sea. That is bad for them, good for us, yes? Of course. Now, you tell me Tito has the OZNA all moved to the south, and Prime Minister Krasnovic is about to leave on an inspection trip to the north of the *Republic.* All very secret. No stories in newspapers, no wireless, nothing. Something very interesting is developing. Have you looked into the movements of the Albanian Prime Minister? Or the Greeks, *Signor* Gould? It might be a very profitable investigation."

"I overheard something between two OZNA men about conferences toward a Balkan federation," Gould said.

"Balkan federation," Coradi said. "Very fancy name."

"The Russians are arranging it, perhaps," Gould said.

"No perhaps. And Krasnovic does not like the smell of it, yes perhaps."

"So they put the pressure on him by taking his daughter and holding her until the conference."

Coradi nodded excitedly. "But the daughter escapes."

"That's very well and good," Gould said. "But where do the two gunmen come in? The ones we stopped on the road. Not to mention a bank account in Zurich in Krasnovic's name."

"Perhaps they were going to kill Krasnova," Monique said.

"Again perhaps," Coradi said. He slapped his hand on the table which held their glasses. "Pardon me, *signorina,* but you may omit the perhaps from whatver is said now. No perhaps. They *were* going to kill her. Perhaps they still may kill her, unless my *ragazzi* move their feet fast enough. Why do you not drink the wine? You don't like?"

"We are really very tired, Coradi," Gould said. "Neither of us has had a full night of sleep since the day before we left the *Republic*. I know this is all very important, but I can't even keep my eyes focused. Our discussions of the Balkan political situation is not going to help her. Not until we find her. We may be all wrong, you know. She must know something, or they would not want her dead. Right now, I'm no good to myself, or to anybody else. Give me a few hours to sleep and I'll talk Balkan politics with you all the way back to pre-Grecian history."

He stood. "Let's go upstairs, Monique."

The girl looked at Coradi, then back at Gould. "You are right," she said. "So long as we were in danger, I could maintain myself in some way. Now, with Signor Coradi here to help us, I find I am falling to pieces. *Signor* Coradi, you will understand."

"Call me Giorgio," Coradi said, rising. "Of course I understand. You must rest. You have been through a terrible time."

They parted, Coradi assuring them he would get in touch with them as soon as anything developed.

Gould and the girl went up in the hotel elevator without speaking. When they entered the girl's room, Gould looked around approvingly.

Monique hummed to herself lightly and walked through the room. She went into the bath.

"Bart," she called. "Come here and see this bath. Black marble. I never have seen anything like it."

Gould walked to the bathroom door and looked in, seeing the girl studying her face in the mirror over the sink. She put a fingertip against the corner of one of her eyes, then turned to him and smiled.

"He likes you very much, Gould. That I saw. And he envies you, I think. That is the word."

Gould went to the girl and put his arms around her, pressing himself against her back. His hands cupped her breasts, feeling them hungrily. She placed her hands over his, pressing them to her. Then she pushed herself free.

"No, Bart," she said. "Please. Not now."

He took his arms from around her, and went out of the bathroom.

The girl followed him out to the hall and into his own

room. It was very much a duplicate of the first room in layout, but the décor was different, more severe, and the colors all matching in a monochromatic scheme. There was a directoire desk and chair, a bureau to match, a tall armoiré recessed into the wall, and a large double bed. The bathroom matched that of the first room in elegance, but the marble here was a dark green, shot with lines of white and gray.

Gould examined the room and decided that he liked the rooms in the old building, the original palazzo, better. They were less well designed and laid out, but there was a feeling of wasted elegance that could not be matched in something new. The windows of these two rooms, also, did not give on the Grand Canal, but on a small feeder canal that was narrow and sunless.

He turned to the girl and walked back with her to the door of her room. The girl leaned heavily against the door jamb.

"That wine was the finishing touch," she said.

"You think you'll be safe alone?" he asked. It sounded ridiculous to him as he said it.

"At this point, Bart, I do not really care. I am here, with you, and whatever happens, will happen. Now we must sleep, before we both fall over dead. I don't know how you drove this morning. I at least slept in the bus to Trieste."

"I think I slept a bit, too," he said.

"And, Bart, do not worry about this Coradi. He is a good man. I can tell by his eyes. I trust him."

"I trust him, all right," Gould said. "I just don't like him."

They kissed, and the girl went into her room. He waited until he heard the key turn in the lock, then went to his room and also locked himself in. He took all his clothes off and bathed, first in very hot water, then took a cold shower, forcing himself to stand under the water for a very long time. Then, drying himself thoroughly, he went out of the bathroom and turned down the silk bedspread, seeing the clean white sheets and realizing suddenly that there was no boat to catch, no car to drive, no busses to cramp himself into, only the bed to sleep in. He got between the sheets and felt his body easing into

the mattress, his head and neck muscles relaxing, and the tension leaving his jaw. He did not remember falling asleep, but he dreamed he was swimming and the girl was kicking as she swam in front of him, kicking, and the water was splashing in his face and keeping him from breathing. Then they were not swimming any more, but dancing on a square, outside a building with a very high clock tower, and the girl was wearing a white chiffon dress with a skirt that flowed very high and wide as she twirled and the neckline was deeply cut so that most of her bosom was exposed. He held the girl at her waist and they spun dancing on the square and she smiled at him and said: "Gould, you know that Bainbridge danced divinely?" Then they heard a gun being fired. But it was not a gun, it was the bells in the clock tower ringing.

He woke suddenly, breathing very rapidly. The phone was ringing. He reached out in the room which was now quite dark.

"Pronto?" he said.

"*Signor* Gould? This is Giorgio Coradi. They have found Krasnova. I come to your hotel now."

Chapter Eleven

GOULD STEPPED from the elevator and down the slight incline in the floor to the lobby near the concierge's desk. Castioni stood behind the desk, sorting a sheaf of papers in his hand. He looked up as Gould approached, and smiled.

"In the bar, *Signor* Gould," he said. "*Signorina* Clermont has already come down."

Gould looked at him, somewhat surprised, then went out through the canalside arch into the bar. There were several parties seated at tables in the bar, and three men sat on high stools at the bar. Giorgio Coradi sat in a far corner. With him were Monique, and a second man whom Gould had not seen before.

Coradi saw him and stood as he approached.

"Ah, Gould," he said, smiling, "you slept well?"

Gould nodded and looked at the girl. She smiled and extended her hand to him. He took it and she held it tightly. He smiled briefly, then turned to Coradi.

"Where is the Krasnovic girl?" he asked.

"She has been located," Coradi said. "A small hotel near the *Giardino Papadopoli.*"

"Near the railroad station?"

"Exactly. My men worked from the points of exit to the city outward. It was not very difficult. When Ricci, here, came to the Albergo Fiorini on the *Rio dei Tolentini,* he knew he had struck home. There is an organization here, mostly Rumanians, under the direction of one Kirací. One of his men was stationed at a small *trattoria* on the fondamento, watching the hotel. The girl is inside, room 216. We have not approached her. Kirací's man spotted Ricci, so there may be some difficulty. That, of course, was unfortunate."

Gould shifted his eyes to the second man, Ricci, and nodded.

"Who is this Kirací?"

"A mercenary," Coradi explained. "He does not even maintain a cover, but has a sizeable organization. I have come up against him before. It was two of his men, probably, who were holding the girl here. She must have tried to leave the city by train, but was spotted and took cover in the hotel she is in now."

Gould looked at Ricci. "Have you seen her?"

"No, *Signor,*" the man said. "But she is in the hotel. We have both the hotel and the Kirací man covered."

"How do we get there?"

"We have a boat waiting," Coradi said. "Are you armed?"

"Yes."

They all stood. Gould looked at the girl. "You stay here, Monique."

"Mais pourquoi?" she said. "I, too, have a pistol."

"It is wiser, *Signorina,* if you stay here at the hotel," Coradi said. "You will be contacted directly, when we get the girl."

"But I have been with all of this so far," she insisted. "Bart, please. I want to be there with you."

"No. You stay here. And don't leave the hotel. Coradi, have you an extra man here?"

The big man in the white suit nodded.

"Have him stay with Monique." He turned back to the girl. "Please, Monique. You heard Coradi. This is no soirée. We will call you as soon as it is over."

Coradi's man, Ricci, left the bar and returned a moment later with another man. He introduced him as Antonio, and Gould instructed the second man to entertain Monique here in the bar, and to await a telephone call before leaving. Then he and Coradi and Ricci left, using the door to the canal terrace. There was a small inboard cruiser tied up to the floating dock. As the three men emerged from the hotel, its engine was fired up, and Gould saw two green running lights wink on in the near dark. There were many diners on the terrace restaurant. The lights had been turned on outside, and he saw moths flying around the lights, and looking out across the canal, the spotlights of the church of *Santa Maria della Salute* were throwing their beams along the buttressing of the old church's walls. A string of colored

lights hung from a balcony in a building across the canal, and from somewhere he heard the sound of music.

They stepped off the dock into the small boat, and the engine was gunned at once, moving them out smoothly into the center of the canal. They went under the Accademia bridge, and turned into the side canal Gould and the girl had come through earlier. The boat moved fast and sent its wake out, splashing hard against the walls of the buildings that came down to the water. Coradi looked at Gould in the dark and smiled. Gould saw the whiteness of his teeth.

"Taking the girl will be no problem," Coradi said. "Unless Kirací has been informed that Ricci was there. Then there may be more than just the one to deal with. Afterward, we will see."

"See what?"

"The girl is your affair, *Signor* Gould. I myself may have to deal with Kirací. I have only invaded his movements before when they have crossed mine. Now, it may be more serious. Tell me, why do you not like me?"

"What makes you think I don't like you?" Gould asked.

"It is obvious. I talk too much and say too little, perhaps?"

"Did the girl say anything?" Gould said.

"No, *Signor*. I see it in your eyes. You are fatigued, this I know. But dislike has its own particular appearance. I just struck you wrong, eh?"

Gould did not say anything.

"Ah, the fates of war," Coradi mused. "The generals cannot always love one another. But later, we have a big dinner together, at *La Fenice* perhaps. Then we talk and begin to love one another as it should be."

Gould smiled, and felt bad inwardly for his preopinioned reaction to the big man. The man had helped him, hadn't he? He had been the one port Gould had found in the storm. Yes, but he also had looked at Monique in a way Gould did not like. So what, Gould, he asked himself. What makes somebody your personal property? Because you gave her a gold lipstick tube? And you swam two miles and a half together in the Adriatic? Put everything in its place. This man is trying to be civil. You

can at least pay him back in kind. Maybe he doesn't think much of you, either. What he just said about this Kirací means this is something he doesn't like very much. This business with Katernia Krasnovic is probably going to leave problems behind for him.

"All right," Gould said. "*La Fenice* it is. But it will be my party. I insist."

"Don't be ridiculous, *signor* Gould," Coradi said, and laughed. "But, about the hotel Fiorini, there are on or two things you must know."

"Yes?"

"These men of Kirací, they are not the barbaric types you have been dealing with. They are not killers in the strict sense of the word. They go much farther. For killing, they are very expensive. That is probably the explanation of the two you told me of, the ones in the Citroen. They were coming here to finish a Kirací job. The Russians are butchers, if I am to explain what Kirací's men are by comparison, how shall I say, they are surgeons. They will use a gun, perhaps, but not to place a bullet between your eyes or in your neck. They will do things that might eventually be repaired, but will leave you slightly less human than you were before. You see, Kirací was well trained. The Iron Guard, you know of them? Rumanian Nazis from the old days, a self-fashioned Gestapo. One branch were executioners, like the ones who shot Tatarescu in the open daylight on a busy street in Bucaresti, just because he happened to represent an opposition to them in the government. Kirací was of the corps used as persuaders, the changers of minds. He has been in and around *Venezia* since the war, and nobody can touch him. His men are dehumanized, but bound by a precision. That is why I referred to the Krasnova as something very much of a woman. If she escaped from Karací, she is something to be dealt with. We must be careful. One cannot predict the manners of Kirací's method."

The boat swerved suddenly into a smaller canal, turning away from the route Gould had taken coming from the *Piazzale Roma*. The boatman throttled back until the engine was just ticking over softly and they were

moving very slowly now. They stayed to the right of the small canal, allowing several gondolas to get by, going in the opposite direction. Then they turned to the left, into a silent and dark canal. The boat ran quietly up to a point where the canal merged with another on the right, and after making the turn, coasted to a stop against a stone stairway leading down into the water. Ahead, at the end of this new canal, Gould could see the lights of the Grand Canal. They had cut through the large western-island half of the city, and were close to the railroad station now, he knew.

"We walk from here," Coradi said softly. "The boat is known to Kirací. It will go on ahead of us, as a diversion, you understand?"

Gould nodded and followed Coradi over the side of the boat and up the steps. The second man, Ricci, came with them.

"Ciao," one of the men whispered.

The boatman repeated the greeting softly and steered the boat back into the current of the canal and began to move along toward the Grand Canal slowly, maintaining a speed that would get it there slightly ahead of Gould and the other two. They began to walk quickly along the stone paving, watching the lights of the boat draw away from them. They passed around a bridge that crossed the narrow canal, and Gould could hear traces of conversations echoing down to them from the buildings above. It was completely dark now, and along this canal there was practically no lighting. They had to go carefully, if nothing more than to avoid walking off the paving into the canal. They stayed close to the building walls and watched the progress of the small motorboat carefully. It had reached a point along the canal where the hotel was, then went beyond to where the canal fed into the Grand Canal. It stopped near the Grand Canal entrance, moving in against the stone bank. Suddenly Gould heard the sound of a small boat's horn.

"It is clear," Coradi said. "That was my boat's horn."

They began to walk faster now, their footsteps echoing hollowly on the stones. They saw a vertical sign hung out from one of the buildings. It read *Albergo Fiorini.*

A man stood erect against one of the stone pilings just over the canal, slightly in shadow beyond the hotel entrance.

"Good," Coradi said almost to himself. "My men have gotten rid of Kirací's watchdog. That one is Egidio, one of my men. We go into the hotel now and get the girl. This is too simple."

They entered the narrow hotel doorway. The man standing guard, Egidio, did not move from his position. An elderly woman sat at a small desk, reading a newspaper. She looked up at them through thick eyeglasses as they stopped by the desk.

"Signorina Krasnovic, per piacere," Coradi said, smiling broadly.

The woman looked them over, then consulted a board on the wall behind her.

"Appartamento vente, signori," she said in a high voice. *"Piano due."*

The girl was in room twenty on the second floor. It was that simple.

"Now," Coradi said as they climbed the two flights of stairs, "to approach this tigress without scaring her to death." He laughed softly.

"Perhaps I'd better do it," Gould said.

"The pleasure is yours, *Signor* Gould."

As they came to the second floor, Gould let the way, walking softly along the narrow corridor, looking at the room numbers. There was light coming from under one door, and, though they walked in complete silence, the light suddenly went out.

Gould held the flame of his cagrette lighter to the door of the room. It was number twenty. He tapped softly on the door, then suddenly felt himself pulled backward violently away from in front of the door. Just then, a pistol was fired from within the room. The bullets came through the door and buried themselves in the opposite wall.

"Remember, my friend," Coradi said in a whisper, "she does not know we are friends. A tigress, I told you."

"Katerina Krasnovic," Gould said evenly, calling through the door, and speaking Slovene, "my name is Gould. Bartholomew Gould."

There was no answer.

"You are called *Bartolomeo?*" Coradi whispered. "I should not have thought so."

"I have come from the capital of your country," Gould continued. "I knew Philip Bainbridge. I am here to help you. I intercepted two men on their way here to *Venezia,* who were under Zarov's orders to kill you. Let me speak with you, please."

After a long silence, they heard a slight sound of a movement in the room.

"You are speaking with me," a girl's voice said. The voice was even-toned and cultured, and ice cold.

"I came here at the advice of a man you may know, Hagop Ashukian."

"Republic Security Police, yes."

"He told me that his ministry received a call informing them that I was going to kill Bainbridge."

"Gould?" the girl's voice said, tentatively. "You said you were Bartholomew Gould?"

"Yes."

"How can you prove this?"

Gould slipped his passport from the case in his pocket and kneeled, sliding it under the door of the girl's room.

"I have put my passport under your door."

The light came on in the room. There was a long silence, then the girl spoke again.

"You are alone?"

"No. I could never have found you alone. There are two men with me. They are friends of Ashukian. Their leader is Giorgio Coradi. You were held prisoner by a man named Kirací. They were holding you for Zarov's men. I want to take you back home. You will be safe, now."

The latch of the door clicked, then the door opened a crack and was immediately blocked by a shape.

"I have a pistol pointed at your face," the girl said. "Do not move. I want to see you. There are three of you, you say?"

"Yes.

The door opened slowly and the girl was standing in the doorway, holding a huge revolver in her hand, pointed directly at Gould's face. She opened the door

wider, throwing light on Coradi and Ricci. She studied the faces of the three men, then stepped backward into the room and signalled with the pistol for them to follow They entered the room, and Gould saw the fear in the girl's eyes, watching every move they made, the pistol shaking in her hand.

Suddenly she collapsed backward into a chair and dropped the gun and she was crying, her face buried in her hands. The three men stood there, not moving, looking down at the girl. When her crying quieted, she looked up and they could see her large eyes rimmed with red, the lines of tiredness in her face, and Gould stepped forward, a handkerchief extended in his right hand. The girl took the handkerchief and wiped her eyes, then stood.

"I am sorry," she said in flawless English. "I have not eaten or slept for two days."

"You will be safe, now."

She nodded vaguely, then looked at Coradi. "You say Zarov had sent two men to kill me?"

Gould nodded.

"This my father did not know, I am sure."

Gould and Coradi looked at each other, then back at the girl.

"You mean your father knew you were being held here?"

"Of course," she said. "It was he who ordered it."

"Why?"

"He agreed to work with the Russians toward the Federation. I opposed him, told him they were merely using him. The fool, he thinks he will gain precedence over Tito in this way. I threatened to expose all of it. So he had Zarov take me to Venice. For a holiday, he told me. I have had a holiday. A holiday to last me all my life."

"We must get away from here," Coradi said.

"How did you find me?"

"This man did it," Gould said, indicating Coradi.

The tall man bowed. *"Signorina,"* he said largely. "It was my honor bound duty, and, now that I see you, my very great pleasure. But we must go. Where are your things?"

She pointed to the pistol on the floor. "That is all my things," she said. "Unless the rest of my clothes are at the Gritti."

Coradi picked the pistol up and hefted it. "Smith and Wesson 357 Magnum," he said. "You fired this gun and did not break your wrist, *signorina?*"

"Why?"

"It is one of the most powerful handguns ever made. You could kill an elephant with it. I told you. Gould, a tigress." He laughed, and handed the pistol to the girl.

They left the room and made their way down past the desk of the hotel, the girl stopping there for a moment and speaking softly to the woman. She gave the woman a sheaf of lire notes, then nodded and smiled briefly.

They filed out onto the stone walk in the dark. The man, Egidio was still standing exactly where they had seen him before. As they passed, making their way to where the boat waited, Coradi touched his arm.

"Bene, Egidio," he said. *"Andiamo."*

The man did not move. Coradi touched his arm again, harder. The man fell forward, rigid as a felled tree. Coradi looked down, then signalled Ricci to go on ahead with the girl. As Gould watched, Coradi examined the dead man's face. He then looked up at Gould.

"If I open his jacket, what you will see will make you ill."

"What is it?" Gould asked.

Coradi lifted the front of the man's clothes, winced, then looked up at Gould again. "He is cut to ribbons inside. There is a metal rod attached to his back, holding his head erect. It is better I do not tell you more."

He left the man on the stones and ran ahead to the boat. Ricci and the girl had gotten into the boat. There was some rapid conversation, then the girl climbed out of the boat, followed by Ricci, and the engine started up. The boat backed water to where the figure of Egidio lay on the bank, then stopped. Coradi and Ricci handed the body down into the boat, then signalled the boatman. The boat moved away, out into the Grand Canal, and was gone from their view.

"Come," Coradi said. "We hire a boat for ourselves."

"Where are we going?" Gould asked.

Coradi's iron expression relaxed for a moment and he smiled briefly. "To pick up the *Signorina* Clermont and have dinner at *La Fenice*. It will pass several hours until the time comes for what I must do."

"What do you mean?"

"Kirací will not see the daylight again, *signor* Gould," he said evenly. "But that does not concern your operation. We must look into what this girl has to tell us now. Let us go."

Gould looked at Coradi without saying anything. Coradi smiled grimly.

"I told you about Kirací, did I not? They are following us now. It is wise we stay in very public places. He will think I have accepted Egidio's death and wait like a dolt for him to kill us all. The face of a *dilletante* is a profitable thing to assume sometimes, no, *Signor* Gould?"

They walked along the embankment out to the Grand Canal, then signalled to a motor taxi and were taken to the Gritti Palace hotel. The girl, Monique, and Coradi's man Antonio were still waiting in the bar. Coradi had Antonio escort Katerina Krasnovic to her room, the rest of them waiting in the bar until she had bathed and changed. Monique asked all of them many questions, but they answered her quite vaguely, avoiding conversation. Coradi was deep in thought, and occasionally would mutter something softly to Ricci. Gould sat next to Monique and spoke softly with her.

"It is all right," he said. "We found the girl unharmed. She is changing her clothes, then we will all have dinner and talk the whole thing out."

"What is the matter?" she asked. "You are not talking as if everything is all right."

Finally, Gould looked at Coradi and turned to her. "One of *signor* Coradi's men was murdered tonight. They did some very bad things to him."

The girl did not say anything after that.

When Katerina Krasnovic came down to the bar, they saw she had washed and changed. She now wore a yellow silk evening dress with a chiffon scarf draped over her hair. Gould noticed how Monique eyed her carefully from head to foot, then smoothed her own wrinkled suit.

"Don't worry," Gould whispered to her. "You're the beauty in any crowd."

She smiled, then took his arm as they all left the hotel, turning right into the small square of *Santa Maria del Giglio,* then right again into the broad shoplined *Corso,* heading in the direction of the restaurant Coradi had mentioned. Antonio and Ricci walked a short distance behind them, not speaking, but watching the movement of every person they passed and approached, with great care.

Chapter Twelve

THEY WERE SEATED in the smaller pannelled dining room of the *Taverna,* and Coradi was making an amazing display of control, considering the manner of his thoughts since finding his man, Egidio. He and Gould discussed the merits of the wine charts, and the ordering of the meal. They chose to start with *Scampi alla Griglia,* a grill of large shrimp, to be followed by individual *Granservoli,* the famous Venetian lobster-sized crawfish. Coradi insisted that Gould choose the wines, and after careful study he selected a bottle of *Soave Bertani 1959* to accompany the grill, and, as an acknowledgment to localities, a decanted flask of new *Verdicchio* for the lobster, the second being a pale wine grown along the Adriatic slopes of the Veneto.

The two men, Ricci and Antonio, had not entered the restaurant with them. Gould did not know where they were, but imagined they were stationed somewhere either just inside, or on the *Corso* near the restaurant.

They drank *martini secco* in silence, and it was not until after the grill had been served and the first of the wines opened and tasted and poured, that Katerina Krasnovic spoke.

"My feelings are for your man, *Signor* Coradi," she said. "To me, they did nothing. Only something small to tell them the name of the American who was stopping at the Grand Hotel. You must forgive me, Mr. Gould. It was I who gave them your name for the telephoning to the Ministry of the Interior. I did not want to leave the Capital because I feared for my father's life. He has dealt with them all his life, and still he does not know them. To him, the killing of Philip Bainbridge was probably an indication of their efforts to prove to him how far they would go to comply with his plan. I know more."

"That Bainbridge was supposed to kill your father," Gould said.

"Exactly. You see, my father has been planning this meeting with Tito and the Greeks and Albanians for a good time now. And suddenly he learns of a bank account in Zurich, and this man Bainbridge appears in the capital and the Americans do nothing to stop him. At first I think it is America who has discovered what my father is up to, and is behind all this of the bank and Bainbridge. It was not so, of course. I have always been talking with my father of the senselessness of attempting to unify the Balkans. But it is his life's dream. Then, in a moment when he seems prepared to move, these things of Zurich and Bainbridge happen and he stops himself. He is frightened, and I am suddenly happy. I think that for a moment he has awakened to what he is doing. And perhaps he is, but a man comes to see him, one Zarov. Vladimir Alexandreivitch Zarov. And when my father leaves the interview, I can see his life has been shortened ten years by what he has been told. Unless he proceeds with his plan, there is a man in the capital with a high-precision rifle and the intelligence to use it. This man is waiting for the word, and he will assassinate my father. It will be made to look like an American trick, and the story of the Zurich bank account will be made public, and, perhaps then, Tito will make a move into the Republic.

"So a plan started by my father is falling back in his own face. Now, he has no choice. It means a chance at his own destruction as weighed against the destruction of his country."

"But why do they want to kill you?" Monique asked.

"Probably for the same reason they try to kill you, or Gould, here," the girl said. "We, any of us, know enough to implicate the Russians in everything that is going to happen. With us dead, the entire matter will fall on my father's head. If they fail, he is finished politically. If they succeed, they have made him believe he will rise to Premiership of an entire Balkan Federation. This idea can blind the eyes of the best statesman, if he has been held in check all his life by nothing more than the smallness of his country."

"But what about the United Nations?" Gould asked. "They would never let a thing like this get so far."

"It would be done before they knew it got started. Then, once it is a *fait accompli,* what will the UN do? Vote a condemnation, or a censure? There will be no show of arms, so a position of world threat would essentially not exist. All that would happen, without their knowing it, would be that the Soviets would now have many excellent harbors in the Mediterranean."

Giorgio Coradi clapped his hands. "I told you this," he said. "The Iron Curtain is pushed a little bit to the west. Perhaps I should begin to cultivate a taste for vodka."

"And your father is willing to take this chance?" Gould said, "in the hope of seeing himself the Premier of such a Federation?"

"You do not know the mind of a national hero in a small country, Mr. Gould," Katerina Krasnovic said. "In the Republic, my father is a giant, a power who has led his people through a vast catastrophe and into the greatest economic era they have ever known. He feels that given the power, the people will follow him, that there will be no foreign influence that can lead them or coerce them away from his leading hand. Under the Americans, he has led wisely, but in frustration. It is simply a case of a great man having outgrown the size of his own country. Such a man can be a perfect tool for what the Russians wish to do." She looked around the table and smiled. "It is all that simple, you see?"

Nobody said anything. To Gould, everything was suddenly released in a great sense of relief, an overpowering feeling of knowing now what everything had been about, and what he was up against stopping. Seeing the shore suddenly seemed to make it that much closer. He wondered within himself whether similar plots were now being hatched in other capitals in the Balkans, other premiers being manipulated into positions of false security. It was, Gould had to admit, a daring gambit. If it worked, there would be a Federation of Balkan states, perhaps even with Krasnovic as its head, if he could push Tito down, and this the Russians might help him do. Overtly, it would appear to be an independent stroke, causing alarm, but probably no concerted international action, just as the manner by which Nasser was

unifying the Arab World was being censured, criticized, worried over, speculated about, and any of a million things governments did when they did not act. And if it failed, as he was going to give his life, if necessary to see that it did, the goat would be Krasnovic, and, if one could judge the Russians, probably the United States would be handed a generous piece of the bad taste.

"We've got to go to Zurich," Gould said to Katerina Krasnovic.

"It is my thought, as well."

"But why Zurich?" Coradi asked. "Everything is known now."

"Not everything, Coradi," Gould said. "We have to have black-and-white facts about this bank account. Who initiated it? Who has been placing the deposits, and, if it is an intermediary, who is his principal?"

"But that is easily assumed, my friend."

"Assumptions mean nothing. Tangible proof."

"Alors," Monique said. "Then we go to Zurich. But to stop the Russians, four of us? *Je ne sais pas, mes amis.* It defies my ability to believe it possible."

"Modesty," Coradi said largely. "For a woman so beautiful as you, who can swim the Adriatic Sea, and another like you, signorina Krasnovic, who can fire a Smith and Wesson 357 magnum pistol, nothing is impossible, no, Gould?"

Gould smiled, but his mind was past this point, already. He had to go to Zurich, and getting there might be no smaller an expedition than getting to Venice had proven to be. This had to be avoided. And, in addition to that, someone had to return to the *Republic*. The telephones could not be depended upon. They had probably monitored Coradi's call to Ashukian that afternoon, letting him know that Gould and Monique had arrived in Venice. And, unless I miss my guess, Gould thought, steps are being taken right now to do something about that.

I will go to Zurich, he decided.

"Have you any entrées into Zurich?" he asked Coradi.

"The Swiss," Coradi said very slowly, "are a very strange people. As Shaw said, they are bores, because they are awed by their own scenery. And thus they are the same about their internal security. The only men in my

business who are allowed to operate in Switzerland, my dear Gould, are ex-generals who are writing their memoirs, and retired master spies. I can be more of a hindrance in *Svizzeria* than a help. But, Gould, you are a master at wines. This one is liquid moonlight."

Gould laughed. "That's what I don't like about you. Everything is liquid moonlight."

They all laughed, and the mood lightened as the giant cold crawfish were served.

"This is a beautiful city, *Signor.* Coradi," Katerina Krasnovic said. "I envy you your life here."

"It is not a bad life," Coradi said. "But one thing I miss in Venezia."

"And what is that?"

"Automobiles. I do not come from Venezia to begin with. Oh, I am from the *Veneto,* yes, but from Verona. I miss that electric sound of a Ferrari screaming past on the road. And I get very tired of the water. So very tired."

"I would miss trees," Monique said. "That is what *Venise* lacks, greenery."

"Nature, bah! This I can live without. Nature, it is all chaos until man puts his hand to it. Look at you, Monique, or the *signorina Krasnovic.* Two more beautiful women do not exist in Venezia. And though you are natural beauties, both of you, who would recognize this beauty unless you had lent nature a hand? Your dress, the manners of civilization in the way you walk and carry yourself. I have seen women, believe me, in *Lignano* or *Grado,* or at the *Foci del Po,* cutting cane, who if someone were to take a brush and scrub away some of that 'nature' they have collected, and hang some true civilization on their backs, would be beauties such as men rarely see. I ask you this, all women are beautiful, Gould, no?"

Gould nodded.

"But which beauties are the greater, the ones who crawl on their knees in the slime of the mouths of the Po, or those delicacies that flick by you on their very high heels along the Via Veneto?"

"It's all a matter of circumstance," Gould said. "One can be as beautiful as the other."

Coradi laughed. "Your tolerance bores me, my friend. I like to look at my women, and if I must smell them, let it be Patou or Chanel, not nature."

"So much for Venice," said Katerina Krasnovic, and they laughed.

When she laughed, Gould thought, she was beautiful. Katerina reminded him of someone, he could not remember. The two women, Monqiue and the Krasnova girl, both great beauties, yet as dissimilar as two women could be physically. Both tall and thin, but while one was soft and warm with liquid eyes and a smile that could break your heart, the other was regal, arch and cool, her eyes fiery coals. The laugh on her lips made the incongruity to her appearance that brought out the true beauty. The same way as when Monique would for a moment lose her consciousness of her femininity, and then became more feminine than ever.

Coffee was served, and they grew silent again. Gould watched Coradi, and knew that beneath all his talk of Venice and nature and automobiles, something deeper was stirring. And it all came down to the name Kirací. He knew Coradi felt a concern for this problem Gould had dropped into his lap, but he knew, as well, that Coradi felt a deeper pain at the dead Egidio than he could possibly feel for the entire population of the Balkans. He was roused from his thoughts as he saw Coradi look at his wristwatch, then stand.

"I do not wish to destroy such an evening," he said. "But there is a small matter which requires my attention. I leave Antonio with you. He is just outside the *Taverna*. I would advise that you return to the hotel and not go out again tonight."

"Where are you going?" Gould asked.

"It is of no importance, Gould. Forgive me, I cannot call your *Bartolomeo*."

"Neither can anyone else," Gould said.

He looked squarely into the big man's face, knowing where he was going, and letting his look tell him that he knew.

"You wish to accompany me?" Coradi asked.

"Yes."

"It will be ugly."

"You saved my life tonight," Gould said. "I feel it my duty."

"Saved your life? Oh, you mean from the Smith and Wesson?" He laughed and looked at Katerina. "Remember, *Signorina,* with a gun as powerful as a Smith and Wesson magnum, you should shoot through the walls at the sides of doors, not through doors. Men who knock on doors rarely stand in front of them. Except our friend, here."

The girl paled, and Monique looked at her strangely.

"I almost killed you tonight," Katerina said. "I would not have forgiven myself."

"Now would I," Gould said and laughed.

"You come?" Coradi said.

Gould nodded.

They left the restaurant without saying more. Coradi instructed his man Antonio to see the two women back to the hotel and stay with them. He then kissed the wrists of both Monique and Katerina. Monique looked at Gould for a long time, but did not say anything. Then both women walked away along the *Corso* with Antonio walking beside them. Gould and Coradi, with Ricci standing with them, waited until they were across the first of the two bridges that led back to the *Campo Santa Maria del Giglio,* the small square where the hotel was located. After they were out of sight, Coradi turned to Gould.

"This, you know, does not concern you, Gould."

"I'll make it my business, then."

"You may not like it. It will be cold-blooded murder."

Gould looked at him and smiled grimly. "I was going to do a very similar thing just three nights ago. I was saved the job."

"By whom?"

"By the Russians, I think."

Chapter Thirteen

THEY TURNED and walked northwest, into the large *Campo San Angelo,* crossing two short high-arched bridges. It was very late now, and the passageways and the canals were dark. The moonlight gave everything a frozen quality, as if nothing they saw had ever moved, or ever would move. Beyond the large *piazza,* they turned into a shop-lined walk, passing the closed stalls and one late night *trattoria* with a marble-topped bar and a giant coffee machine. Nobody said anything. When they were beyond the lights and the walk narrowed, they crossed another bridge. On the far side, Coradi put his hand on Gould's arm.

"We wait now for a moment," he said, and drew Gould into the darkened entrance of a building. Ricci walked to the shadow of a house across the walk.

"We are a false point," Coradi said. "If you understand military terminology."

"A false advance guard?" Gould said.

He saw Coradi's teeth in the dark, as the tall man smiled.

"We have been followed by two of them. Did you know that?"

"No."

"They are the unfortunates, Gould, who will become the stick that probes the hornets' nest."

"How do you mean?"

"I told you it would not be pleasant. Perhaps it is better I say nothing. You will see everything soon enough. I have never wanted to accept Kirací here, but there was no point in ridding the city of him. Also, he made it simple for me to be selective about who I worked for. The Russians are very big hagglers over prices, and Kirací has always worked more cheaply than me."

"You've worked for the Russians?" Gould asked.

"Never. But out of no particular love for anything.

You see, they have never met my price. Who knows, perhaps that is the rationale I have established for not dealing with them. They want to buy you, not retain you for a service. They think they know better how to execute an operation than the people they employ. Decentralized command is the heart of any military failure."

"How did you get into this?" Gould asked.

"My *accademia* was the staff of Badoglio's forces. I found I liked the partisan work, so later I got into business for myself. Like a Hessian mercenary general. But I am selective about my employers. Kirací is under virtual contract to our 'friends.' He has been a bad businessman. Effective, but bad. Now, with Egidio, of course he has gone too far."

Gould did not say anything.

"You know Ashukian well, Gould?" Coradi asked him.

"Hardly at all," Gould said.

"He was a liaison officer with Tito, you know. That is how we met. He lacks the willingness to accept responsibility. That is why he became a policeman. But I like him tremendously. He has great respect for you."

"He barely knows me."

"He has the eye of a hawk, my friend. He can appreciate a situation in no time, at all. Listen, Gould, as with Ashukian, I have accepted this that you are involved in without questions. But, for my curiosity alone, tell me, what are you to all this? You are not of the American service, this I have found out, already. For whom do you work, the English?"

"No," Gould said. "Not the English. Perhaps I am a mercenary, such as you. I would rather not discuss it."

"As you wish. It was only professional curiosity, you understand."

He suddenly put his hand on Gould's arm.

"Now we must be very quiet. They come."

Gould heard a scraping sound, as of a shoe on stones, then he could hear footsteps on the paving.

"Ricci and I will do what is to be done," Coradi whispered to him, placing his lips very close to Gould's ear. "It may be painful to watch. But it will serve its purpose."

Placing his arm against Gould's chest to indicate that he should stay back, Coradi stepped out of the shadow of

the doorway. Two men were walking casually along the *corso*. As they came abreast of Coradi, he stepped into their path and faced them.

"Bona noté, signori," he said, and Gould saw his teeth again as he smiled.

The men stopped and stepped back, reaching into their coats. Before they could do anything, two men came up behind them and pinned their arms back, placing hands over their mouths to prevent any outcry. Then Gould saw Ricci step from the shadows across the walk and he heard a metallic snapping sound, seeing the glint of a long knife blade suddenly swing open, as he approached the two men. Ricci bent suddenly, kneeling near the men and the knife stroked swiftly at them. Gould heard a slight muffled sound, as if a scream had been choked off almost completely, then the two men were released. They collapsed in heaps on the stones, and Coradi looked around.

"We run now," he whispered. "Come."

Gould fought a wave of nausea at what he had just seen, and stopped to look down at the two fallen men. He felt a sudden wave of hatred for Coradi, and shook his arm off as the big arm tried to urge him away.

"It is not what you think," he said. "Nor even what *they* think. They can still walk, believe me, but perhaps not too well. But it is what I want. Come, please. We must hurry now, to make the picture complete."

One of the two men began to stir as Gould rushed away along the *Corso* behind Coradi and Ricci. He could hear the sound of running feet farther ahead. The two others, he thought. Then he stopped thinking and just ran with the men, noting their direction was toward the bank of the Grand Canal. They came to a final alley-like stone walk and their footsteps echoed hollowly as they ran. At the foot of the walk, there was a row of broad stone steps leading down to the water. The small power boat was waiting. There were no running lights showing now. The men all piled into the boat and the engine began to turn over softly as it moved out into the canal.

Coradi looked at Gould. "You do not like what you see?" he said. "I did not think you would."

"Why did you do it?"

"Simple. It must appear as my stroke of ultimate vengeance for Egidio's death. Kirací is not a fool. He has been expecting something all night, I am sure. This will cause him to relax. To relax for a moment too long, and then we strike. Those two men will go to Kirací's place. A small palazzo on the *Rio San Luca*. I have made the last act of their life an easy one. They do not have far to walk in their condition; I saw to that. Kirací thinks his place is secret. What we did to his men will convince him of it. They will go there, plunge the hornet's nest into a minor bedlam, war will be declared, and in the confusion of their preparations, we will appear, and *poof*, it is all over."

Gould had seen war before, but had not seen it conducted by men out of uniform and in the streets of a city ostensibly at peace. He could comprehend the nature of Coradi's tactic, but the setting left him dazed. He hated it, while still understanding it, and, in the confused emotions, chose to remain silent.

"The deliciously executed plans of international intrigue are as disgusting and inhuman as all war, Gould. Do not think less of me, please. You would not denounce a good officer whose military prowess had manipulated a victory, would you? No. And yet, it is the same. The word victory has a glorious ring in war. But in the end it usually means nothing more than cool methodical slaughter. Only in war, they give medals for it. You know war, Gould?"

"Yes," he said quietly. "I know war."

His mind had suddenly raced back to the war he had known, and the raid he had commanded, a long range penetration that had earned him the highest medal his country could bestow. And beyond its higher purpose, Gould thought, it had been a calculated slaughter that made this night with Coradi a minor skirmish. No, he thought, I am nobody to be revolted by these things.

He looked at Coradi and smiled. Then he took the Mauser from under his arm, snapped off the safety and retracted the slide, catching the ejected cartridge. The action was working stiffly. He withdrew the magazine, inserted the cartridge, and returned the magazine to the

stock. He then drew the slide again, charging the chamber. He returned the gun to its holster.

"I was checking the action," he told Coradi. "The gun was wet when we swam from the ship."

"Don't worry, Gould. The Germans made the finest weapons the world has ever seen, and that pistol of yours was the crowning achievement. The last Mauser ever put into production. You know that?"

Gould nodded. He felt Coradi's hand pat his shoulder twice, then everything became quiet. They moved up the canal slowly, reaching a point where Gould could see the entrance to a feeder canal. There the boat stopped and stood off from the entrance to the channel.

They waited now in the darkness and no one spoke. Gould looked around the open cabin of the boat and counted six men, not including himself. That made Coradi, Ricci, the two men from the *corso,* the boatman and one more.

"How many does this Kirací have?" he asked Coradi.

"Counting the two we have already met, thirteen. It is an unlucky number, no?"

Nobody said anything and the waiting began in earnest. Gould listened to the low throttled ticking of the engine, alternately soft and clear, and muffled and bubbling as the boat rose and fell on the water. It was the only sound he could hear in the night. He thought of Monique and Katerina Krasnovic, back at the hotel now, seeing them looking nervously at the man who had gone with them, Antonio, trying probably, and not succeeding in learning what he, Gould, and Coradi were up to now. It is better if they do not know, Gould thought.

In the end, they did not have long to wait. Coradi was looking down the length of the *Rio San Luca* with a pair of night glasses, studying the small bridges that crossed it at three places back in from the Grand Canal. After perhaps fifteen minutes, he whispered softly to the men, and gave instructions to the man at the controls of the boat. Almost imperceptibly, the throttle of the boat's engine increased and they began to move into the mouth of the *Rio San Luca,* the engine ticking faster now. Gould heard the snick of a pistol slide being drawn, and then,

at Coradi's order, the throttle of the boat came wide open, the engine roaring now and the banks of the narrow canal suddenly wildly awash with the boat's wake.

"There are three entrances," Coradi told Gould rapidly. "We have divided into as many groups. You come with me, if you want to."

Gould nodded.

The hull of the boat scraped loudly as they touched the bank and all the men were over the side in a matter of seconds. Gould noted that the engine had been let to run out of gear and a line from the boat's prow was tied to a stone piling. They moved up to the entrance facing them, and then Gould saw two groups of two men each fan away right and left, one along the stone walk over the canal, the other around to the left, into the darkness. They all moved fast now, and quietly, and walking beside Coradi, Gould led their group up to the main entrance of the small *palazzo*. They stopped for a moment at the door, listening. They could hear animated conversation coming from within the building.

"Good," Coradi said. "I saw the two unfortunates cross a bridge just before. They are in there now, screaming and telling it all. I hope they are all there. They may not know that the fourteenth member of their group is dead already. He was stationed in the *Campo Santa Maria del Giglio,* outside your hotel."

Coradi looked at his watch, then turned back to the men behind him and nodded. One of the men stepped forward between Gould and Coradi, and Gould saw him point the muzzle of a sub-machinegun at the lock of the door. The gun exploded in a series of violently echoing shots and the door swung open. They rushed through the wide doorway and along a tiled entry hall past a series of low arches. He heard gunfire from two other places beyond where they were running. The other doors, he thought. Then they were standing in the broad arched entrance to a large room and, three steps below, Gould saw a group of men standing over two others who lay on the carpeted floor. They had looked around in complete surprise at Coradi and Gould and the two others. The two other pairs of Coradi's men now appeared at archways behind the men on the far side of the room. Then

everything stopped for an instant, as Coradi let the full final knowledge enter Kirací and his men that it was he who was now standing there.

"For Egidio," Coradi said simply, and nodded to the man with the sub-machinegun.

A hail of gunfire exploded into the room and the Kirací men began to fall. The machinegun fired three more short bursts, and it was all over. The fire had lasted fifteen or twenty seconds altogether, and now Gould saw the mass of bodies crumpled in the center of the room.

Beside Coradi, he came down the three steps to the room and moved carefully to the group in the center. Coradi was counting, his lips moving as he walked. Satisfied, he turned to look back at his men. Just then, one of the figures rose slightly. It was a tiny movement, at the end of which a Luger appeared in the man's hand. Gould's hand was in and out of his jacket in one movement and the Mauser fired three times. The hand with the Luger collapsed.

Coradi looked back down.

"Grazie," he said to Gould quietly. "There are thirteen here. All finished. *Andiamo."*

They all turned and filed out quietly, pulling the door closed behind them.

Once out of the house, they moved rapidly, dropping into the boat with military precision as lights began to show in houses above them. The line was cut loose and the boat moved rapidly away along the *Rio San Luca.* They passed a small branch canal on the right, then, a short way along, another one on the left. They came out of the *Rio* into the Grand Canal. The boat turned left and throttled down to a leisurely speed.

They came alongside the low wooden docks where all the gondolas tie in on the *Riva Degli Schiavone,* and the men separated, going their individual ways and saying no more than casual goodnights. Gould walked with Coradi back through the small square, passing the Doge's Palace and on into the *Piazza San Marco.* They did not speak as they walked, but continued on through the square and out. Outside the hotel, Gould and Coradi stopped to speak quietly for a few minutes. Then they went in. The night clerk nodded and they went around

past him, into the bar. Antonio was there with the two women. They all talked briefly and low while Gould and Coradi drank brandy. Then Coradi rose, shook hands all around and left with Antonio. Gould saw the women to their rooms, stopping to speak for a moment with Monique. It had been decided that she would not come to Zurich, but she tried to argue with him in the hallway outside her room. She asked him in, but he refused. Then they kissed passionately and said goodnight.

He locked himself into his room and undressed hurriedly. The bath did not help much, nor did the few more mouthfuls of brandy he drank from the bottle he had. He lay on the bed thinking, and finally, when the sky began to show light through the window of his room, he fell into what seemed to him a sort of half-lit world in which he was sometimes asleep and sometimes awake. He stayed like this until it was fully light. Then, he knew, there would be no more time for sleep. He got out of the bed and showered. Then he shaved carefully and slowly, and dressed. He ran the elevator himself, going down to the lobby and having several cups of strong black coffee in the bar.

Then, preparing the possibly necessary diversionary tactic, he reserved places for two on the noon train to Milan, while he knew that Coradi was arranging seats on an early morning Swissair flight to Zurich. After completing the never-to-be-used reservations for the train, he returned to the bar and waited for Monique and Katerina Krasnovic to come down.

Chapter Fourteen

SWISSAIR FLIGHT 4508 lifted from the airport on the Lido at 1025 hours that morning. Seats numbered 9A and 9B of the Super G Constellation were occupied by Bart Gould and Katerina Krasnovic. The plane climbed in a tight three hundred sixty-degree turn over the city and Gould looked down through the window on his left past the girl, seeing the canals and *corsi* arranged below him as on a map.

They had arranged it all very carefully. Gould and Katerina Krasnovic would fly to Zurich. Katerina had a friend, a minor official in a Swiss banking firm, through whom they were confident that records of the Krasnovic account could be obtained from the *Schweizer Internationale Kredit Union,* the banking firm with whom the account was deposited. Upon completion of this small matter, Gould and Katerina were to board the eastbound *Simplon Orient Express* in Zurich that evening. The train made an overnight run through Milan to Mestre and Venice, then continued on through Trieste, Ljubliana, Belgrade and the Capital of the Republic, before it completed its journey through Athens and on to Istanbul. Monique and Coradi would come aboard the train in Venice and together they would make the trip to the Capital, where, it was hoped, Anastas Krasnovic would be made to see the light of day.

They were going to stop what they all now recognized as the beginning of the end of a free European community of nations.

The Constellation climbed steadily over the Veneto and below them they could see the country begin its break for the climb into the Dolomites and farther on into the Trentino Alto Adige. They were able to pick out the long finger-like shape of the *Lago di Garda,* after passing over Vincenza and Rovereto. Then the plane

seemed to soar, climbing higher until the land below became a continual monotony of haze.

A luncheon was served by a German speaking hostess whose purplish-blue eyes smiled perpetually, and whose long thighs moved easily and splendidly inside the tight-fitting navy-blue skirt she wore. Gould tried to sleep on the plane, but reacted pleasantly with every passage along the plane's aisle by the hostess, whose name he never learned. He looked at Katerina Krasnovic, her face a regal mask, and thought of the pleasant feeling it gave him to know he missed Monique, and what she might be doing at that moment.

Below them, the places Gould had known in other times continued to be left behind, *Santa Gertruda* and the lakes, *Bormio, Livogno* and the pass over the border near *St. Moritz.* They would be very high now, Gould thought, flying over the marvelous small places, *Filisur,* and *Chur* and Bad Ragaz and then *Flums* on the *Walen See.* After that, it would be a long downhill glide, approaching Zurich from up the full length of the *Lake.* He felt the plane begin to lose altitude and looked past Katerina Krasnovic out the window.

"We should be able to see Zurich Lake soon," he said.

She turned to look out the window indifferently, then turned to him as he leaned across her seat. Her face was very close to his and she looked into his eyes and smiled slightly.

"You did kill Philip Bainbridge, didn't you?" she asked softly.

"No."

"You were going to," she said. "Monique told me last night."

He nodded. "I wasn't fast enough."

"He was a very unpopular man, you know. I thought to kill him, myself, once. Did you know that he was a great hero in America, Gould?"

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes. One night, he tried to use war stories as an aphrodisiac." She smiled, then licked her lips. "It is well he is dead. He was no good."

"He has been dead since the spring of 1945, Kater-

ina," Gould said. "Everything since then has been the final breaths."

"The dead hero," she mused, "whom everybody wanted dead again, in the end."

The plane dipped suddenly, and the girl stiffened, then relaxed.

"I have never liked flying," she said. "The world is too small already."

She smiled incongruously, and rested her head back against the seat. Gould looked into her eyes, then let his gaze drop to her long elegant neck and the swell of her breasts showing through the silk blouse she wore. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap, the knuckles white from the tightness with which she held them together.

"How soon do we land, Bart?"

"A matter of minutes," he said, and realized that she had been silent through the entire flight because of her fear of flying.

"I should have gotten you something for sleep," he said.

"It would not have worked. This is too much for me. That German girl, the hostess, she probably loves to fly. You have been watching her."

"It was not her love of flying that appealed to me," Gould said.

The girl blushed, and he smiled broadly.

"Relax, please," he said. "We'll be down very soon."

The plane banked sharply to the left, slowed perceptibly and began to descend. Gould saw the girl was breathing very fast. At the end of the bank, they saw a corner of the lake below them, then the left wing came up and they heard the thump of the landing gear locking into place. There were several more slight drops during the landing approach, and Gould held the girl's hand tightly. Then they felt the hard bump as they touched the runway, and the nose came up for the second bump as the nose wheel touched, and they were slowing. The engines were throttled heavily forward, eased back, and the Constellation was taxiing back from the end of the field. The girl's eyes opened and she smiled self-consciously.

"That was nearly as bad as the *Albergo Fiorini,*" she said.

A car brought them south from the airport, turning left along the bank of the *Limmat* and past the museum on the island in the river to the hotel on the Utoquai, the *Bellerive au Lac.* They looked out over the expanse of the Zurich Lake. The air was crisp here, and cool, and after the restriction of the airplane air conditioning, sweet to their senses.

After the girl had signed the register for a room, notifying the management that she would check out after dinner that night, Gould and she arranged for a first class compartment on the Orient Express for that night as far as the Capital of the *Republic.* Then they were shown to the room by a bellboy. The room was small and almost surgically clean, with a narrow balcony facing the Lake.

The girl lay on the bed and closed her eyes.

"Flying tires me terribly," she said. She twisted her head and smiled up at Gould, then undid the top buttons of her blouse and breathed deeply. He studied the way the weight of the silk of her blouse lay against the shape of her full breasts, rising as she breathed. She crossed her legs on the bed, unconcerned about the resulting exposé of her legs. Her skirt had ridden well up along her thighs, showing the tops of her stockings and the pale skin above. She rolled on her side and smiled at Gould.

"It must be the champagne they served with the luncheon," she said, somewhat lightly. "I have attended state functions since my mother died and I became my father's official hostess. But you know, I still cannot accustom myself to champagne."

Gould looked at his watch. "I think we had better contact your friend," he said. "There is not much left of the business day."

She looked at him blankly, then passed a hand over her eyes and sat up. "You are right, of course. You know what I am, Gould? I have a cause suddenly, but beneath it all, the Prime Minister's daughter is a bored tramp. I love the idea that Bainbridge is dead, but I hate it as

well for I found him a very exciting man. Do you find me attractive, Gould?"

Gould did not answer.

"You like the blonde with the slanted eyes, I know," she said. "Bainbridge liked her, too."

Then she sat up erect, rubbed her eyes and shook her head, and suddenly the past few moments seemed never to have existed. She looked at Gould without expression, then lifted the telephone at the bedside table.

She gave the operator a telephone number, pronouncing the German words without a trace of accent.

"Guten tag," she said, speaking into the phone, after a short wait, *"der Herr Rudolf Freikessel, bitte."* Then there was another pause, during which she smiled at Gould. *"Hallo, Rudi,"* she began, after the pause.

There were a few words of greetings exchanged, during which the girl laughed several times, and spoke German very rapidly. Gould could not follow her too well. Then, suddenly, she got to the business at hand, and her tone changed at once. The conversation lasted about fifteen minutes, Gould watching her closely the whole time. He caught pieces of the conversation, as the girl explained what she wanted. The man at the other end of the phone spent some time explaining the impossibility of her request, because after a long pause, she turned on the charm, turning and twisting her words with promises and hints, suggestions and remembrances. Then her eyes brightened, and she nodded at Gould and smiled.

"Gut, Rudi," she said excitedly. *"Ja, halb drei. Danke, Rudi, Auf wiedersehn. Ja bis halb drei."* She replaced the phone.

"He will telephone here at two-thirty," she said.

Gould looked at his watch again. About twenty minutes.

"Gould," the girl said, "I think I should like a drink."

"More champagne?" he asked and smiled.

"No," she said and laughed. "That is over. My dedication is returned. Speaking with Rudi reminded me of an unpleasant experience with a man. Do you drink *kümmel?*"

"Why not?"

She picked up the telephone and asked for the bar, instructing them to send up a bottle of kümmel, one of Dutch gin and one of French vermouth, with some ice, a shaker and glasses.

There was a polite tapping at the door within five minutes. Gould opened it, and a bar waiter nodded politely and pushed a small cart into the room. A spotless white cloth was spread on the top of the cart, and on it stood the three sealed bottles, a bucket filled with chipped ice, a shaker, and two high-stemmed cocktail glasses. Gould signed the bill, tipped the bar waiter and closed the door.

The girl set to work immediately, measuring equal amounts of the kümmel and gin, then adding what amounted to a dash of the vermouth. She held the shaker by its top and swung the mixture around until it was well chilled, then drained the shaker into the two glasses. She handed one to Gould, raised the other one for herself, and lifted her glass.

"Prosit, Gould," she said.

He tasted the drink. It was dominated by the taste of caraway and was one of the strongest drinks he had ever tasted. He watched as the girl downed her glass in one draft.

"Usually, you are supposed to smash the glass in a fireplace," she said. "But we have better use for it, no?"

She began to mix up another batch of the drinks, when the phone rang again. She put the bottle down and rushed to the phone.

"Hallo? Ja, Rudi," she said. *"Ja, ich verschtei. Ja. Moment, bitte."*

She placed her hand over the mouthpiece. "The deposit was initiated by a local broker, who has placed all the subsequent deposits," she told Gould. "But Rudi pursued it further. The broker was acting as an intermediary in behalf of a foreigner."

"Who?"

The girl smiled. "Vladimir Alexandreivitch Zarov."

"Ask him if an affidavit can be obtained to that effect. Yes, and a photo-copy of the bank records."

The girl spoke into the phone for a long time. She placed her hand over the phone again. "It might be

done. But it is a complicated matter. To accomplish it today will take some very hard pushing."

"How much?"

"Perhaps two thousand francs Swiss."

Gould reflected a moment. That was very little, actually about four hundred dollars. Gould nodded.

"We've got to have it before five-thirty," he said.

She closed her eyes and began talking into the phone again. She looked at Gould as she spoke, mentioned his name, then spoke some more and rang off with a laugh.

"I would prefer not to see Rudi," she said. "I have arranged for you to meet him at a café, the *Uberlaken*. It is on the island, where *Banhof Strasse* meets the *Alpen Quai*. Not far from here. At 1700 hours. That is all right?"

Gould nodded. He would meet the man at the arranged time, five o'clock, and this would give them two hours to get to the station for the train. He sat down in one of the large chairs in the room and relaxed.

"Fine," he said.

"Good," the girl said. "Now what do we do for two hours, Gould? You want to shop, perhaps? Or a drive to see the lake? Switzerland has scenery that can, as Coradi said, awe you."

Gould indicated the bottles on the serving cart. "They are still pretty near full, aren't they?" he asked.

She glanced at the cart. "Good," she said. "Let us see who can drink the other, how you say, under the table."

After three more cocktails, which, she explained was known as the *Kaiserin* cocktail, and drunk by only the wealthiest of Balkan scum, Katerina decided it was very warm in the room and removed her silk blouse. Gould studied the intricate lace of the girl's brassière as she sat on the bed looking at him and smiling. The fabric was very fine and the color of her skin showed through, the dark centers small and perfect circles. He began to feel the effects of the drinks and thought to move closer to the girl. But after she had mixed a fourth round, she looked at him and began to cry.

He placed his drink down carefully and went to the girl, helping her to her feet and leading her into the bathroom. He opened the glass door of the shower stall,

turned to look at her as she stood wavering and held her under the shower head, bending her head forward and turning on the water. She yelled once, then stood there, he holding her until she began to shake her head. He let her back out and turned off the water.

"You shouldn't drink," he told her.

She reached for a towel and rubbed her face and head, drying her neck and shoulders and winding the towel around her hair. She looked at him and turned and left the bathroom without saying anything. He followed her out, seeing her turn away from him as she slipped her blouse over her shoulders and fastened it. She turned to face him, her eyes flat and emotionless.

"I am a much better person when I am frightened," she said. "Freedom and time do ugly things to me."

"It might be a reaction to what you experienced in Venice," he said.

"It is a reaction I have experienced too many times in my life. I am sorry."

They did not speak much after that, and Gould stood by the window looking down at the Lake. He saw a white steamer with a high black stack move out of a dock and begin its way down the length of the Lake. The steamer broke the smooth surface of the water, sending a long vee-shaped wake out behind it. When the wake reached the shore, small boats tied there began to rock as the wash passed under them. When he turned away from the window, the girl was sitting at a vanity table, combing her hair. Whatever it was that had possessed her was now over. She was the cold regal thing he had seen in Venice. She looked at him in the mirror and smiled, lighting a cigarette and blowing smoke at her own reflection in the glass.

Gould looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to five.

He checked his billfold to see that he had enough cash to complete the transaction with Rudi. Then the girl gave him a very accurate description of the man, and smiled.

"I'll be back in twenty minutes," he said.

"Give Rudi my love," she said. Then she added: "Wait. I'm sorry. No, don't give him my love."

Gould smiled and closed the door behind him. He

heard the girl lock the door from the inside. He walked down the stairs and out onto the lakeside road.

The man Rudi was at the café, promptly at five o'clock. The girl need not have given him so accurate a description. He recognized him immediately by a brown paper envelope he was carrying. Their meeting was polite and courteous, and lasted all of thirty seconds. Gould checked the contents of the envelope, gave the man the money decided upon, thanked him kindly, and refused an apéritif. He shook hands, turned and walked back along the *Alpen Quai,* turned right at *Utoquai* and entered the hotel through its main entrance, facing the Lake. He walked up the broad staircase to the floor of their room, went down the carpeted hall and knocked on the door. He heard a key turned in the lock and he opened the door and entered. As he opened the door, a strange chill went up the back of his neck. The room was too quiet. He pushed the door wide open and saw Katerina Krasnovic lying on the floor near the window, her silk blouse covered with blood. He instinctively rushed toward her, then heard the door close behind him. He stopped and turned, reaching into his jacket for the Mauser.

"I would not do that, sir," a man standing at the door said.

Gould's hand shook and his heart pounded loudly in his ear as he stood there, turning first back to the girl, dead on the floor, and then back to the man who stood facing him, a long-barreled Luger pistol in his gloved right hand, the muzzle pointed at Gould's chest.

The man smiled coldly for an instant, then removed his homburg hat. Gould noted that there was not a hair on his head.

"Zarov," the man said, nodding his head slightly. "Vladimir Alexandreivitch Zarov."

Chapter Fifteen

VLADIMIR ALEXANDREIVITCH ZAROV stood at medium height, his muscular body clothed in an impeccably cut double-breasted blue serge suit, white shirt and pearl-gray tie. He wore black shoes (Gould noted his left shoe had a built-up sole and heel), gray suede gloves, and a black homburg which he now held by its brim in his left hand. The gloved right hand, holding the navy-model Luger with its eight-inch barrel, hung relaxed at his side. As Gould had turned to face him before, a second man had come out of the bathroom and, at Zarov's orders, bound Gould's wrists behind his back, using steel wire and a small pair of wire cutters to crimp the twist and cut the wire when he was finished. The wire held his wrists so tightly bound that he had already lost the feeling of his hands. He was ordered to the backless chair near the vanity table, where he sat rigidly, looking from the body of Katerina Krasnovic to the eyes of Zarov. There was a fury raging within Gould, which he strove to contain.

Zarov was studying the contents of the large envelope he had taken from Gould, and the second man sat on the edge of the bed smoking a very long filtered cigarette and watching Gould, covering him with his own Mauser. They had searched him carefully and, to Gould's surprise, had returned his billfold and passport case to his pockets.

"Very interesting," Zarov said, looking up from the papers. "However, you may be interested to know that this information is obsolete. The account has been closed, my dear sir, and the money withdrawn. There is an order under discussion with a dealer whose headquarters are in Monaco, a countryman of yours, incidentally. The esteemed Minister Krasnovic, it seems, is arranging for the purchase of arms. He will be disappointed, I fear. You see, the moneys, withdrawn under his signature, have already been redeposited in a new personal account. In my name,

of course. You understand, this is a fringe benefit of the position I hold. No one is the loser, except Krasnovic, or this whore of a daughter of his. And, of course, you, my dear sir."

Gould looked down at the girl again, then back at Zarov. He did not say anything.

"You do arouse my curiosity, Mister Bartholomew Gould," Zarov said, smiling. "Were conditions other than they are, I might press to discover your motives. Might I ask simply, here and now, what your game is?"

Gould said nothing.

"I thought not," Zarov said. "Ignorant reticence is a mark of your type. I do not know who you represent, and it does not really matter. If it were important, the information could easily be gotten. As it is, with the purpose to which I plan to put you, it would not do to have your body mutilated. As you mutilated my men Kranek and Budin."

Zarov crossed the room in fast limping strides and struck Gould across the side of the face with the barrel of the Luger. Gould reeled under the blow, the right side of his face suddenly on fire. The vision of his right eye was blurred slightly and from its corner he could see a dark shape at the side of his face. The pain dulled his sight for a moment, and his hearing. When he was aware again, he heard Zarov speaking.

"Switzerland is not a country in which one should be messy," the man was saying. "It is an insult to their national pride. One must always sweep up one's droppings. The whore will be left where she is, here. You, however, will make the package a neatly wrapped one. You see, Mr. Gould, you will be driven to the eastern frontier by my friend Grisha, where you will be released near the control point at Buchs. The Swiss authorities, however, will already have been informed that the murderer of this girl is attempting to make his escape across the frontier into Austria. They will be waiting for you, and they will see you try to run across the border into Feldkirch. But it will not be you. You see, you will have been left on the trail my man will take, and you will have a bullet in the back of your head. A bullet, I might add, from the barrel of a Swiss Army Luger. Show him, Grisha."

The man on the bed, transferred Gould's Mauser to his left hand and extracted a Luger from under his jacket. He held it up for Gould to see. It was a regulation Luger, but with a red cross embossed on a white blaze on the grip of the stock.

"We try to be thorough, Mr. Gould. Your body will be found, and the authorities will establish that you were shot by one of their own number as you were attempting to cross the frontier. Very simple, no?"

The man called Grisha put the Swiss Luger away and again pointed the Mauser at Gould.

"Why do you not say something, Mr. Gould?"

Gould looked down at the girl once more, then turned to Zarov and uttered an obscenity.

"A quote of one of your country's statesmen, Mr. Gould?"

"No," Gould said coldly. "A statement in keeping with what you've been saying these last few minutes."

"Ah, so our guest does have a voice after all." He turned to the man Grisha. "You know, Grisha, we were somewhat hasty with the Krasnova girl. We should have kept her alive until Gould returned. We might have amused ourselves with her, with him as an audience. It would have made him speak very easily and we should then have known everything without having to tear him to pieces to find it out. How would you have enjoyed that, Mr. Gould? Watching as Grisha here removed the little whore's clothes before your eyes and did certain things to her which I will not even bother to describe. I doubt that your silence would have lasted, and it would have been interesting to learn what you are. A shame, as I said. But, one must vanquish certain pleasures for being hasty."

He stopped for a moment and watched the hatred and fury in Gould's eyes.

"So you thought to stop what we are now doing?" he then said, and laughed. "With the help of this slut, you were going to change the course of history. No, Mr. Gould, it is not that simple. The stakes are too high."

"You'll never push your borders back to the Adriatic," Gould said.

"Push our borders back to the Adriatic? Oh, you speak of our liberation of the Balkans. Yes, Mr. Gould,

we will do that. But surely, that is not what you have believed our goal was in this venture? Our ultimate goal?"

Gould watched his eyes as the bald man laughed grotesquely.

"If we merely wanted to take over the Balkans, it would be a much simpler affair to accomplish. Agitate a small civil affair, a people's physical negation of a government's political stance, and we could easily offer our aid in seeing that the people got what they thought they wanted. Revolutions are easily initiated, Mr. Gould. But we do not have the time for that. It would require the establishment of a provisional revolutionary government, then the well-planted gestures that would cause the censure of that government by your country, and others, perhaps even the United Nations. The course of geopolitics in our times, Mr. Gould is such that a new country, denied the hand of one thief, must of cause turn to the other. Look at your neighbor of Cuba, Mr. Gould. It was an easily engineered thing. Now, of course, as I said, there is no time. We must have the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean by this coming autumn. There is no time for politics, especially Balkan politics. At best, they have always been such a bore.

"But imagine, Mr. Gould, with our fleet ready to move out together, say from Piraeus, from the Capital of Krasnovic's pathetic little *Republic,* from Kotor Bay, from Split, perhaps even Fiume, all having entered through the Dardanelles and called on every major Mediterranean port in gestures of good will, then putting in where I have described. But in these small ports, they are armed, Mr. Gould, armed for war such as the world has never seen. Mr. Gould, we could make a Soviet version of Mussolini's dream come true, the Mediterranean will be a Soviet lake. Not a Roman lake, Mr. Gould, a Soviet Lake. And before winter of this year. Think of it, I beg you. The Suez Canal is no longer yours. You are manipulated about its use by a petty thief like Nasser. What is there to stop us? Gibraltar? A large rock that is an archaic idea of strategy. It is the perfect entrée to the greatest potential in the world today, Mr. Gould. Yes, Africa. The balance of power in the whole world can shift decisively within the next nine or ten months, Mr. Gould. Now, do you begin to see how the death of our friend Philip Bainbridge be-

gan a chain of events that will change the history of the world? A simple stroke in the Balkans, like Princep's bullet on the bridge in Sarajevo, will become a shot that will echo through all eternity."

Zarov's face was congested now, from the passion of what he told Gould. He stopped and breathed deeply, smiling as he watched Gould's eyes.

Gould looked at him. It was impossible, he thought. A maneuver so bold that it had to be recognized and stopped in time. And yet, Gould said to himself, and yet, the entire thing could be brought so far along its course before anyone in the world knew anything that its sheer momentum could make it be triggered. Then, of course, there would be no censures or condemnation. The Russians might hinge their strategy on us sitting on our hands. They have good reasons to feel we will do this, dating back all the way to 1935, when Hitler marched into the Rhineland with two puny battalions of Wermacht (with orders to pull right back out if any force was shown in opposition). But this time we would not sit still. We would fight. And that, Gould realized, would probably be the end of civilization as we know it. Sitting here in this room, with his hands bound with steel wire, he was being held from an attempt to stop the first of a series of events that might spell the end of the world. The thought was staggering. It could not be. He could not bring his mind to conceive it. Millions of people dead, the world a vast desert, and all motivated by the greed for economic spheres of influence. A shift in the balance of power, as Zarov had described it.

"Do you believe the West will do nothing to stop you?" Gould said.

"Of course. They would not jeapordize the world. They would not take the chance. They would not destroy mankind, just to stop a small shift in economic superiority. They must save the world from atom bombs. Good, then, let them save it by inactivity. And we will run it for them, in the end."

Zarov looked at a watch in his upper breast pocket.

"But enough of this, Mr. Gould. I am not a geopolitician, merely a soldier. I will, with your permission, make use of your train reservation this evening. I must be in the

Republic to assist Krasnovic in the last of this. And, of course, your friends will have to be intercepted in Venice. They are planning to join you aboard the train, are they not?"

Gould did not say anything.

"Of course, they are. The lovely French girl, no? And that Badoglio fascist Coradi? I will make your apologies for not being able to be with them. But now, you must excuse me. *Dos vye danyah, Mr. Gould. Prosteet'ye myeah.*"

Zarov then turned to the man called Grisha and spoke very rapidly to him in Russian. He looked at Gould one last time, nodded his head soberly, put his hat on, and limped to the door. He turned once more, smiled, then he was gone.

Chapter Sixteen

THEY HAD unbound Gould's wrists for the walk down the stairs from the hotel room, through the lobby of the *Bellerive au Lac,* and out onto the lakeside road. The man, Grisha, had walked close beside him, the Mauser under his light raincoat held loosely over his arm. Gould had walked slowly, his mind racing between his last mental picture of Katerina Krasnovic lying dead on the floor of the room, and some manner by which he might break free. He knew any hasty movement would make the man fire. It would be the end, and Grisha might be caught, but it would achieve nothing. The side of his face was swollen and pained him badly, and the thought of the girl dead in the room sent a wave of emotion through him that he could control only by tightening the muscles of his jaw and staring straight ahead, attempting to drive the picture from his mind.

The car was parked just across the road from the hotel, and Gould felt a moment of surprise when he saw it, recognizing the massive front fenders, the three huge headlamps and the solid-looking grille of an 8-litre, twelve-cylinder Mayback Zeppelin, the rod across the grille with the chrome letters spelling out the word Zeppelin. The car was in brand-new condition, and it must have been at best a 1938 model, he thought. A gas-eater, but fast and solid.

Perhaps this is what hapens when you are about to die, he thought. You see everything sharp and clear, meaningless details standing out and crowding into your head. And the joke is, of course, how you try to push them away, even when you know there is nothing you can do.

There was a man wearing a wool cap sitting behind the steering wheel of the huge car, and Grisha opened the back door, holding it while Gould stepped inside. Grisha followed him, sitting on his right, and uncovering the

Mauser now as it stood poised in his hand, pointed at Gould's chest.

The car moved away from the curb as soon as they were seated, and, to Gould's surprise, they did not bind his wrists again. As the car passed out of the populated area along the lake, they began to go faster on the road bordering the north side of the lake. Soon, they were well beyond the outskirts of Zurich, and he heard the whine of the tires as the car tore up the road. They swung north, away from the lake, and slowed passing through Uster, then picked up the pace again, the roar of the supercharger cutting into the 8-litre engine as the heavy car began to race at close to 100 miles per hour.

Gould wondered when they would kill him. Probably not before they reached the frontier. One of them, Grisha probably, would be putting on the running performance at the border, for the benefit of the Swiss police, and he, Gould, would be left on the trail, the back of his head blown away by a 9mm Swiss Luger cartridge. He rubbed the side of his face and thought carefully of what he might do to prevent this. He might wait for an instant when Grisha was not looking and make a dive for the front seat, breaking in and ruining the driver's control. One instant was all it would require, at this speed, and the car would be spinning and piled up someplace. But the chance of his getting out of it was very small, very small indeed. He might try opening the door at his side and diving out, but, again, at this speed, it would be virtual suicide. He could possibly wait until the driver had to slow the car. He thought of the road ahead, what towns lay between them and the border, where was the crossing Zarov had mentioned, Buchs, yes. Feldkirch was the town on the Austrian side. Let me see, he thought, going with the road we are now on, there is Wattwil, then Herisau and Appenzell and Nesslau. Then there is the short run through the hills to Buchs, where the road comes down parallel to the railroad and closes up for the border control. There are four chances, and they are not good ones.

He sat in the car, looking at Grisha, then the back of the driver's head, waiting for the pass through the first

town. Nobody said anything. They came to Wattwil, and the big Mayback Zeppelin did not slow at all. It tore through the town at full speed, the sound of the supercharger thundering its echo from the low buildings beside the road, and Gould looked blankly out the window, knowing this idea was nothing more than a simpler version of the suicide the other plan would have been. They would not slow down until they reached the frontier. There might be a small chance then, a very small chance. But it would never work. No, he was beaten, sitting in the back of the big car, after everything he had come through since leaving the Republic, how long was it now, three days. It seemed like three years. Beaten and being driven to his own death in a giant antique automobile and guarded by a Russian who was using his own Mauser pistol to prevent anything happening. He looked at the small, streamlined automatic in Grisha's hand, and something suddenly struck him. He tried not to show anything in his face, as he thought of it, the last hope, the one slim chance, the almost unbelievable gamble that was now presented.

As he glanced casually at Grisha's expressionless face, he smiled inwardly and looked down at the Mauser again. He then turned away, not wanting to chance his looking at the pistol into giving anything away. He thought back, remembering the night the *Marina di Ravenna* had gone down, and swimming to shore, the pistol wrapped in all their clothes, being soaked. He had cleaned it as well as he could, and, he thought, used it once more. The night before, with Coradi, in the Rumanian Kirací's headquarters. It was two days now since the pistol had been wet. Two days for the moisture to work on the internal firing mechanism, the mechanism which, he now remembered, he had only dabbed at with the damp handkerchief. It was a tight gun, but enough air entered along the edges of the barrel slide and through the magazine for rust to have begun to build by now. There was the chance, the slimmest chance, that by now the striker and the striker spring, the sear and the trigger catch, the pivot pins and perhaps even the internal edges of the double-action hammer had fused with rust, sufficiently, at least, to prevent the gun firing.

The gun had operated perfectly the night before, of course, he thought. But the parts had had almost twenty-four hours to oxidize since then. He cursed the necessity for having had to fire it the night before. If I had not had to, he said to himself, it would be a sure thing that the gun would not fire. Now it was only a chance, a small one. But it had to be taken. There was no other way. He thought back rapidly. Grisha had not used the gun. He had merely taken it from Gould's holster, snapped off the safety. Gould remembered how the safety had stuck slightly, and from its weight, Grisha had known it held cartridges. He had not even drawn back the slide to check if there was a cartridge in the chamber. This was the chance, he thought. It had to be.

A chance that he would die immediately, or get out and perhaps save Monique and Coradi, and even stop this whole madness of Zarov and Krasnovic. And against what? Against the unalterable end of a bullet in the back of his head.

His mind made up, he looked out the window and watched the buildings of the small mountain town of Appenzell flash by as the car raced along the road. They were perhaps twenty kilometers from Nesslau, now. Then came the short treacherous run to the border. It would have to be before Nesslau. He could not chance fighting for the wheel, if this worked and he got to Grisha, while they were twisting and turning along a climbing road up to where they met the railroad. No, the next twenty kilometers were the last open road before the frontier, perhaps eight or ten minutes more.

He looked at Grisha, his face drawn tight. The man's hand held the Mauser steadily, still pointed directly at him. Grisha smiled.

"You have about twenty minutes more of living," Grisha said. "Enjoy them well. The scenery is the best you could want to see, no?"

Gould did not say anything.

"You are very fortunate, you know?" he said to Gould.

"Yes, very fortunate," Gould said.

"I mean to say, *tovarich,* that if it were not important that the only mark on you for the Swiss police to find was the hole at the back of your head, I would be very happy

to make your last twenty minutes the worst of your whole life. You see, Kranek and Budin were very dear friends of mine. It grieves me to give you a painless death, believe me."

He laughed lightly as Gould said nothing.

"But it will be more than made up for by what will doubtless be done to your little French girl. The thought upsets you, perhaps? Good. Now I know how to take the sweetness from your last minutes of life. Listen to me, *tovarich,* here is what they will do to her."

Gould allowed his face to harden with feigned revulsion and pain as the gloating Russian began to describe the manners in which Monique would be toyed with. The Russian warmed to his own words and let his sadistic imagination well up scenes of sexual horrors that, were he truly listening, might well cause Gould to be violently ill. He continued to let the man believe he was being tortured by his words, while his eyes made final rapid measurements of the distances and allowances for room within the back seat of the car. His eyes turned for an instant to the back of the driver's head, again to evaluate distance and a manner of execution of his plan.

He listened deaf-eared while his mind counted the minutes remaining before the big car would be tearing through the town of Nesslau. Four minutes remained, then three, then two. It had to be now, still out of the town, and with enough road left to do what he had to do before anyone along the road could see him.

Grisha was sitting up straight, his eyes bright and his mouth moving rapidly over details of what he pictured as Monique's final moments of life. The car was moving at the high speed it had maintained all through the trip, Gould's eyes scanning the instruments for an instant and noting the speedometer needle vibrating over the one hundred eighty kilometer mark. Almost ninetyfive miles per hour, he thought. He turned back to Grisha, his eyes flicking down for an instant to the Mauser pointing at his chest. Now, he thought.

He brought his right hand up slowly, as if to touch his face, but straightened his hand flat and lashed out sharply with all his strength. His aim was perfect,

and the edge of his hand caught Grisha directly across his throat, driving in, and he felt something crush inside the man's neck. He heard the automatic reaction of Grisha's finger squeeze the trigger of the Mauser, and his mind was suspended for a flash. The gun snapped dryly. The action was frozen solid. Gould's left hand doubled into a fist and rammed down hard into Grisha's groin. His right knocked the Mauser from the Russian's hand, the elbow bending upward and jamming into the already crushed throat. The man had not made a sound, but Gould felt the car swerve suddenly and heard the screaming of tires as the driver began to brake the car's speed. His hand was in and out of Grisha's coat, now holding the Luger. He smashed the butt hard against Grisha's temple, then spun around and held it to the back of the driver's neck.

"Stop," he ordered.

He saw the driver's right hand move up tentatively, but he forced the muzzle of the pistol hard into the man's neck and the hand was lowered. The car came to a gradual halt, stopping finally at the side of the road.

"Spasibo, tovarich," Gould said into the man's ear, and, holding the muzzle tightly against his neck, squeezed the trigger rapidly, three times.

The car bucked and moved forward again. Then the engine stalled and everything stopped. Gould's hand was shaking badly. He closed his eyes for a moment, then slowly turned to look at the man in the back with him. The man, Grisha, was dead, too. Gould looked at him and realized he had smashed his esophagus with his first blow. The subsequent blows had been unnecessary. He pushed the body down to the floor of the back seat, and quickly climbed out of the car. The air here was cold in the late afternoon sun. It would be dark in about an hour.

He opened the door to the front, and pushed the driver's body down to the floor under the right-hand glove compartment. He then got behind the wheel and started the engine. He remembered that each shift of gears with this car required a careful double clutching, and there were five forward speeds. He checked the fuel gauge, then tapped the glass and checked it again. The

car was almost out of gasoline, but still held enough, he hoped, to get across the frontier into Austria. He threw the clutch in and moved the car out on the road, coasting easily through the five gear shifts and familiarizing himself with the car's handling and qualities. By the time he was through the small town of Nesslau, he had mastered the handling of the big heavy Mayback Zeppelin with its twelve-cylinder engine, and he jammed the accelerator to the floorboard to cut in the supercharger. The car surged forward into the uphill climb that led into the twisting road through the hills toward the frontier.

When the road began its descent, he saw the long silver bands of the railroad tracks easing in gradually toward a path parallel to the motor road and he slowed the car, knowing the town of Buchs was just three kilometers distant and he would have to stop for the passport control. He stopped the car close to the railroad, and climbing out and stepping around to the right side doors, opened both the front and rear doors and dragged the bodies of the two men off the road into the rocks beyond the shoulder. He searched the driver's pockets and found the car's papers. The men would be found soon enough, he thought. If not by the already alerted police, then noticed by a passenger on the next train that would pass here. The bodies were in full view of the tracks. Gould went back to the car and got his Mauser from the floor of the back seat. He looked at it for a moment, then turned and threw it far off the road. He pressed the Luger against him, in the holster under his arm now, the new weight and shape unfamiliar and somewhat bulkier than the smaller pistol had been. He hoped the shape did not show too obviously under his coat. He inspected the car hastily for any marks, and, grimly wiped some of the driver's blood off the front dashboard and the lower section of the windshield. Then he knotted up the handkerchief and placed it under a rock beside the road. He climbed back into the car and started the engine again. There would be the border to cross, and a stop for fuel. In Feldkirch, he decided. Or someplace smaller, if the fuel held out. St. Anton, perhaps. He could telephone to Venice during the stop for fuel. Then there would be a night of driving that he hoped his

body was up to. He had not slept at all, except for the few hours in the room in Venice the evening before.

This is going to be some night, he thought, as he threw the car into gear and coasted down the road to the frontier control.

Chapter Seventeen

THE SUN SHOWED its first red light, streaking over the hills from the east as Gould forced the heavy car down along the Italian road toward *Udine*. He was pushing everything the car could give now, having driven through the night steadily, stopping twice for fuel and the frontier control at the Brenner Pass, eating three *wurst* and hard rolls quickly as the car was fueled, and trying, at each stop, to place a call through to Venice. He had crossed the Swiss-Austrian frontier with no difficulty, continuing on past Feldkirch and Bludenz to St. Anton where he had stopped first for fuel and to try to call. The call could not be put through because of difficulties on the line and he had continued driving on into the darkening evening through Landeck and on to Innsbruck, where he had stopped and tried once more to get a clear telephone line to Venice. The call still not completed, he drove south from Innsbruck, passing through Steinach and reaching the Italian border at the Brenner Pass sometime after midnight. There he stopped, ate, and discussed the weather with a pair of *carabinieri* as his car was serviced, and tried once more in vain to call Coradi in Venice.

The drive down through the *Trentino* had become hazardous in the early morning dark because of a heavy mist that covered the road, and coming into *Cortina d'Ampezzo* he had felt himself falling asleep at the wheel and nearly lost control of the car on a tight curve over the town. He drove slowly after that, dropping down into the Venetian Plain where he checked his covered mileage against his watch and decided he could never beat the Simplon Orient Express to Venice. He would have to drive on to Trieste in the hope of beating it there. He stopped once more, after crossing the *Tagliamento* at *Tramonti di Sopra,* and tried to call Coradi. Again, he was unable to get the call through, and he knew now it was too late. Coradi and the girl would be boarding the

train soon. They had probably left the hotel, or wherever they now were, and gone to the station. He hoped that Zarov would not get to them before the train arrived in Trieste.

Now, crossing through Udine in the first sunlight of the new day, he knew he had seventyfive kilometers to drive before he would reach Trieste. But here, the roads were good, and now it was daylight. The worst of it was behind him. He had the windows of the car wide open to keep fresh air blowing against his face. There could be no stopping for sleep now. The train was due for its three-minute stop at Trieste in exactly forty minutes and he had close to forty-five miles left to drive, not counting what traffic he would encounter entering the city along the heavily used road from Monfalcone, along which he had driven with Monique less than fortyeight hours before, going in the opposite direction.

He cleared the last of Udine and the road stretched away beside a river, straight and level and empty of traffic. He timed his run to San Giovanni, knowing the distance and calculating the speed he was now making, and felt he would reach Trieste with perhaps five minutes to get through the station.

He took the back road from Cormons, where the main road stretches away to Gorizia, and turned south, crossing the winding Isonzo River three times over wooden bridges, and cut into the *autostrada* north of Monfalcone without having seen another car on the road. Now the traffic began to appear on the road, and as he shifted lanes on the road, weaving in and out from behind slow-moving trucks and cars, his fear became one of being stopped by traffic police.

He cut through the small town of Aurisina and knew the halfway point between Monfalcone and Trieste was past. The traffic thinned out, miraculously, for the last of the run into Trieste, and he drove the car through the outskirts of the town, forcing his speed lower as he entered built-up areas. He left the car at a taxi station at the foot of the station entrance just as he heard the metallic voice of a trainman announcing the arrival of the Express over a public address system. He ran through the station, out past the platform gates and onto the

trackside where the train was screeching to a halt. Through the steam rising from beneath the cars, he could read the metal plate naming the stations of the train's run through to Istanbul. Doors were being opened all along the platform and after three passengers had alighted from an exit near where Gould stood, he stepped up the high steps and closed the door at that end of the car. He pressed himself tightly into the corner of the car vestibule, fingering the Luger in the holster under his arm, and waiting for the train to move out of the station. He felt his eyes closing, heavy with sleep as he stood in the end passageway, but he was suddenly roused by the shrill whistle of the train, and momentarily thrown off balance as it began to move. He shook his head, then leaned forward and looked out onto the platform as the train moved out of the station. There were passengers who had gotten off still walking along the platform. Suddenly Gould's eyes widened, and he leaned to his left to look again. Among the people walking along the platform was a tall man, dressed in a blue double-breasted suit and a homburg hat. The man had a decided limp. It was Zarov. He was too late. Zarov had left the train, his meeting with Monique and Coradi finished. This meant they were probably dead in their compartment. He tore at the exit door, but the train was already out of the station, moving very fast as it shifted to a center rail with loud clickings, and the shrill whistle blew again.

Gould placed his hand against his face, rubbing his eyes and steadying himself against the rocking of the train with his other hand. The compartment. He closed his eyes, forcing to remember the compartment number of the reservation he had made in Zurich. Yes, he remembered the small *Place Louée* cards the man at the desk had written out. *Voiture 3, compartement 6.* He walked back into the car he had gotten on. It was a second-class coach, the six-place compartments all ranged along one side of the train. He walked rapidly down the corridor and on into the next car. He found an Italian conductor standing in the end space smoking a cigarette, and asked him how far along car 31 was. The conductor looked at him strangely, then directed him three cars along. He mumbled a hasty *"Grazie,"* and ran down the corridor.

Car number 31 was a first-class compartment car. The aisle passed along one side of the car and on the right were the row of doors leading into the private compartments. The doors were all closed. He made his way along the corridor, following the numbers backward from 18 down toward number 6. He felt the train begin to slow. This would be for the frontier, he realized. But the passports would all have been given to the trainmen while the first class passengers slept through this early morning border control. Nobody would be coming through here.

He followed the corridor down and stopped outside the door of compartment 6. He did not want to open the door, fearing what he would find there, Monique and Coradi, probably both dead. Then, as he stood outside the door he heard a voice from inside. A man, speaking in Russian. Another voice laughed coarsely, and then he heard the girl.

"Cessez," he heard her say, *"Je vouz en prie. Tuez moi."*

His heart began to pound rapidly as he stood there a moment longer, pulling the Luger from under his arm, and hearing the laughter once more. Then, in one movement, he threw his weight against the door, hearing a slight cracking sound as the door flew open and he stopped short, looking into the compartment.

The girl was on a turned-down berth, completely naked, her arms tied to a wall hook above her head. Her legs were spread apart, tied by the ankles to the corners of the foot of the berth. Coradi was bound and gagged, slumped in an opposite corner of the compartment, his eyes wide. Two men were standing in the compartment, both turned now, frozen as they looked at him. One of the men was partially undressed. Gould rushed forward blindly, striking the first of the two men, throwing him backward against the drawn blind of the compartment window. He heard the rattle of glass shattering as he spun and slashed at the second man's face with the Luger. The man thrown against the window hauled himself erect as Gould's toe swung up and caught his groin. He saw the man's face contort in agony as he brought the gun butt down on the top of his head. The second man had fallen forward, over Coradi. Gould turned and lifted him by the

back of his jacket, smashing his face down hard against his raised knee. He then let the man go, seeing him fall to the floor lifeless. He looked at Coradi and saw his eyes blink, then turned to the girl. Her tear-streaked face showed red fingermarks and her body was a mass of welts. As Gould looked at her, fresh tears welled up in the corners of her eyes.

"They said you were dead," she said, her voice little more than an agonized whisper.

He touched the side of her face gently, and swiftly untied the bindings that held her hands and legs. She huddled her body together and covered her face with her hands, then looked up at him.

He tried to smile. "I thought you were dead, too," he said.

She shook her head and looked at Coradi. Gould turned to him and tore the gag from his mouth, then untied the belt with which they had bound his wrists and ankles. The big man coughed and breathed deeply, then raised himself slowly and looked into Gould's eyes. Neither man said anything for a moment, then both turned to the girl. She was still crying, but had covered herself with a *Wagon-lit* blanket and was sorting her clothes from the twisted mess of the berth.

"Krasnova?" Coradi said questioningly.

Gould shook his head. "They shot her."

"The pig with the limp wanted to shoot us, as well," Coradi said. "But these two were in a mood to play. He was feeling very well, so he gave them what they wanted. We were to be dead before the train came to Ljubliana. He got off in Trieste."

"I know," Gould said. "Do you know why?"

"To fly to Krasnovic. Something was said about a conference being initiated this afternoon. Tito is to be there, and the Greeks and Albanians as well."

They all looked up as the train came to a halt.

"The frontier," Gould said. "They won't come through this car."

"No, unless they notice the broken window," Coradi said. "Let us be quiet."

Nobody said anything and the girl dressed in silence.

They could see by her movements that she was in great pain. A strain showed in her expression, but she did not say anything. She looked at Gould for a time, her eyes deep and pained through the tears, and reached out to hold his hand. He placed his other hand over hers and pressed it tightly. She began to cry again. They were quiet like this, in the strain of forced silence, until they felt the train begin to move again.

They then turned their attention to the two Russians. Both men were unconscious. The girl looked down at them, but turned away immediately.

"We can do nothing bad enough to them," Coradi said. "But I have a thought."

He raised the blind, uncovering the cracked window. They saw then, why no notice had been taken at the frontier. The thick plate glass had cracked as the Russian had been thrown against it, but only a small burst of shattered glass showed in one lower corner, where the man's elbow, perhaps, had struck it full force. There was no glass missing from the window.

"After Pivka, the train turns north to Ljubliana," Coradi said. "We cross a river, very slowly on the turn. That is the place to get rid of these two. I hope they will be conscious when it happens."

Using the cords with which the girl had been bound, they tied both unconscious men hand and foot. One of the men began to regain consciousness as they did this, and Coradi looked down at him, waiting for his eyes to open and then kicking him viciously at the side of the head. The man passed out again, and they turned up the berth and Gould, Coradi and the girl sat down, Gould and the girl on one side, Coradi facing them.

Gould slowly told them all of what had happened in Zurich with Katerina Krasnovic, the papers, returning to find her dead and being taken by Zarov. He then quickly related what had occurred after leaving the hotel, getting away from the two men, and his drive through the night to catch the train.

Coradi nodded. "With us, they simply placed guns against our backs shortly after the train left *Venezia*. They directed us into this compartment, and Zarov put

on a performance similar to what he did with you in Zurich. He likes to hear himself philosophize on the emergence of Soviet spheres of influence."

"They are going to try to pull this off in the hope that we won't trigger a war in retaliation," Gould said.

"This I understand, my friend."

Gould felt his eyes closing. He shook his head to keep awake, held the girl's hand. "Tell me," he said, "is there an airport in Ljubliana?"

Coradi nodded. "I have good machinery in Ljubliana."

"All right. Here is what we must do. It will probably be of no use, but we must try. In Ljubliana, we'll get off the train. You think you can arrange to hire a plane?"

"Without any difficulty," Coradi said and smiled.

"Good. We try for a telephone connection through to the Capital, to Ashukian. No mention of anything, you understand. The Russians are tapping every international wire, I think. So far as they know, we are all dead. We have that much, at least, in our favor. We'll have Ashukian meet us at the airport in the capital; something about simplifying passport clearance. Anything to get him there. Then, once we're there, he'll have to drive us to Krasnovic and we'll lay the whole story in front of him. If necessary, in the end, I'll kill him if I have to. But we've got to stop that conference before it ever starts."

"I will have to arrange to steal a very fast airplane," Coradi said.

Gould nodded, and looked at the girl. "I can't keep my eyes open," he said. "Did you have any sleep last night?"

She looked at Coradi briefly. "Yes," she said. "Several hours. I begin to feel better now. I don't know what I feel. I cannot say anything. You sleep, please. You must have rest."

The train began to slow again.

"Ah," Coradi said. "Pivka. I must lower the window. The air will be good."

He stood and lowered the window to the sill, stepping back.

Gould released the girl's hand and stood at the open window, breathing deeply. He rested his hands on the sill and bent his head, his eyes automatically reading the lettering on the metal plate attached to the sill. *É Pericoloso*

Sporgersi, Ne Se Pencher Pas En Dehors, Nicht Hinauslehhnen. Don't lean out the window, he said to himself, mentally translating the trilingual warning on the metal plate.

He turned and looked into the girl's eyes. She smiled and he sat down next to her, placing his head against her shoulder. He looked at Coradi as his eyes began to close. The last thing he was aware of was the marvelous feeling of the girl's hand touching his face as he fell into a very deep sleep.

Chapter Eighteen

THE PLANE was an Aero Commander 680F, the property of a *Conte Guiseppe di Mantova,* a nobleman from the *Veneto,* whom Coradi had spent forty minutes locating from the airport at Ljubliana. The *Conte di Mantova* had brought a party into Yugoslavia for a kayak expedition along the rapids of the *Sava* river, from *Škofja Loka* down to the trail of low falls above *Litija.* It was a sport he had discovered the year before, and was attempting to popularize to international proportions among his set. Coradi had seen the plane on the field, recognized the Italian registry numbers and about locating the *Conte.*

The cabin of the high-wing multi-engine six-place craft was completely equipped with an electric refrigerator, in which reposed fifteen magnums of *Perrier Joué Fils 1949* champagne. Coradi opened one bottle, claimed it to compare very unfavorably with his beloved *Lacrima Christi 1955,* but managed nevertheless to finish the bottle with the help of Gould and the *Conte*'s pilot, a Florentine named Mario Benevento.

With the top speed of the Commander at a fixed 255 miles per hour, the three hundred and fifty mile flight lasted less than one and one half hours. They had been unable to contact Ashukian by telephone from Ljubliana, but had finally made a radio relay to the Ministry of Interior signals section through the airport tower at the Capital. Ashukian had not acknowledged their message but, looking down as the Commander circled the field for its landing approach, Gould saw a car on the airport tarmac, a long black sedan with a high radio antenna and a red signal light on its roof.

The pilot made a crosswind approach and brought the Commander down steeply, leveling out the last instant and setting the three wheels of the tricycle landing gear down at the same instant, then turning and smiling at the girl. Gould directed him to taxi the plane back to

where the black sedan was parked, and as the engines were gunned for a last time and cut off, and the propellers spun down to a sticking halt, they saw the tall, shaven-headed figure of the Republic policeman running out toward the plane. Gould noted he wore a small bandage over his right eye, where he had struck him with the rifle barrel.

The greetings between Ashukian and Coradi were very protracted, with much falling into each other's arms and kissing on the cheeks. Ashukian then looked at Gould.

"You have had nice holiday, yes?" he said. "You look terrible."

Gould smiled wearily. "How is your Yugoslav partner?"

"You break his wrist very good. He no good no more for police work. Makes me very happy."

He nodded politely to the girl, then pounded Gould's back and smiled broadly. "Now I bet you are sorry you did not let me arrest you, yes? Of course, you would not have had the fortune to make acquaintance of the *Mademoiselle Clermont.*"

Gould raised his hand to bring the banter to an end. He was about to speak when a small biplane sputtered down on the field. After its engine sound had faded, Gould rubbed his chin and looked at Ashukian.

"Where is Krasnovic?"

"Gone to the north. Remember I told you, inspection trip in the north province. Probably trying to find *partizan* general named Voszek who does not like the government. Shows his dislike by trying to blow up new powerplant. Very polite politics in the north." He laughed then.

Gould looked at Coradi, then back at Ashukian. He placed his hand on Ashukian's shoulder and led him away toward he black sedan, talking rapidly. At one point, Ashukian looked back at Coradi, his eyes narrow. He stopped, waiting for Coradi and the girl to come up with them.

"You see that the Krasnova is dead?" he asked Coradi.

Coradi shook his head. "It was in Switzerland. The same man tried to kill the girl and me on a train this morning. What he tells you is the truth, Hagop. This is a good man."

"I do not know Zarov is back in the Republic," Ashukian said. "Wait one moment, please."

He walked away rapidly to the black car, and sat next to the driver, speaking into a telephone receiver. He spoke for a few minutes, then shook his head and hung the receiver back on the car's dashboard. He looked up at Gould and Coradi and the girl, then got out of the car and walked back to them.

"The Prime Minister was accompanied on his journey to the north only by his chauffeur, and one other man, an electrical engineering expert from northern Europe who will render a professional evaluation of the powerplant on the Kodice river, near the northern border. Certain repairs are required since the raid by Geneal Voszek."

"What is this engineer's name?"

"This was not known by the Ministry. It can be gotten through the Prime Minister's offices. I was given a description, though."

Gould grinned. "A tall man, wearing a double-breasted blue serge suit, and with a homburg hat. When he removes his hat, it can be observed that he has no hair on his head. The man also can be distinguished by a decided limp as he walks."

"But that is correct," Ashukian said.

"Yes," Gould told him. "Now, you know Zarov?"

"Yes."

"Describe him to me."

Ashukian began to recite the physical description of Vladimir Alexandreivitch Zarov as it appeared in the dossier maintained within his ministry files. Halfway through the description, he stopped. "The same man," he said. "But of course."

"How far is it to this powerplant?" Gould asked.

"To the border on the north. Not the coast road. Inland, where the Republic east highway enters Yugoslavia near Skoplje. Near the corner of our country where we touch also with Albania. Perhaps two hours' drive."

Gould thought a moment, then looked at Coradi. "No good."

Coradi shrugged.

"Tell me, Ashukian," Gould said, "is there a helicopter on this field?"

Ashukian smiled. "What do you think this is, *Tempelhof* aerodrome?"

Gould turned and ran back to the Commander. The pilot, Benevento, was watching a mechanic fuel the plane.

"Mario," he called.

The pilot saluted smartly and smiled. "Signor?"

"How long a field do you need for landing this ship?"

The pilot looked at the sky for a moment. "With fifty feet clearance, perhaps thirteen hundred feet. Twelve hundred, with Benevento flying. No less."

Gould turned and called to Ashukian. The policeman broke off his conversation with Coradi and walked toward him.

"What are the roads like near the powerplant?" Gould asked.

"Balkan roads," Ashukian said. "Must I say more?"

"There is no flying field up there?"

Ashukian only smiled.

"Is there a stretch of straight road near the plant, say four hundred meters?"

Ashukian was silent for a moment. "Directly near the frontier," he said. "There is a parade ground. It dates back to the days of Hungarian cavalry. Where they mustered for their southern maneuvers. Perhaps three hundred fifty meters square. It straddles the frontier. There are three sections of concertina wire directly across the ground, and it is badly pitted. You are thinking to land this airplane there, no?"

Gould nodded.

"You are crazy, my friend."

Gould turned to the pilot. "Well, Mario, you heard the man. Do you think it is possible?"

"With an approach diagonal to the shape of the ground, perhaps," the pilot said. "The wire, of course, could make this suicide. It is important that you land there, *Signor?*"

"It is more than important, Mario. It could mean all our lives."

"This landing could also mean all our lives."

Gould exchanged looks with the pilot. Suddenly, Mario Benevento smiled and turned to the mechanic standing on the wing.

"Basta," he called to him. "We will need little petrol for this madness. *Signor. Andiamo.*"

They climbed into the cabin of the plane, and Benevento had the engines turning over before their seat belts were fastened. He locked the right wing wheel and gunned the powerful plane into a sharp right ground turn, idling back for the taxi run out to the flight line.

"The *Conte Mantova* may find it necessary to discover a different means of transport from *Ljubliana,*" Benevento said. "I may get this plane into that field. But to get it out is another thing. They will have to come with tools and take her apart and truck her out."

"I'll guarantee the price of the whole plane," Gould said. "Let's go."

The engines reacted to Benevento's advancing the throttle until the whole plane trembled against the locked wheels. Suddenly, the brakes came off and they were moving across the runway, gaining speed rapidly, the engines roaring with their combined 760 horsepower, and suddenly the sound changed to a clear ringing vibration as the plane lifted from the ground and banked into a sharp climbing turn to the north. The wheels folded up into the wings above them and Benevento turned to Ashukian.

"The maximum speed is four hundred kilometers per hour. How far north to this parade ground?"

"At this speed," Ashukian said, "it is twenty minutes' flying time. North, northeast. You will see the powerplant, the dam on the Kidice River. You should spot the river shortly. Follow it directly up. The parade ground will appear as a tan square almost touching the dam. I flew over this country once."

Benevento did not bother to gain altitude and they achieved maximum speed at a height of little more than a thousand feet above the ground. Gould sat directly behind the pilot and turned occasionally to look at Monique, who sat next to him.

"You should have stayed at the airport," he told her.

"I could not remain alone," she said. "It is no good alone, not ever again."

They spotted the river, and Benevento brought the

plane down low over the silver line it formed. The Kidice flowed north in a valley between two high ranges of hills. They flew low over the course of the river, following its curves, the crests of the hills above their line of flight.

"The river takes many bends above the dam," Ashukian told the pilot. "I should acquire greater altitude, if I were you."

"What is wrong, policeman?" Benevento asked him. "You do not like the manner in which I fly this machine?"

"I do not appreciate unnecessary madness, my boy."

Benevento stayed low over the river, until Ashukian alerted him that the dam was very close now. He then pulled back on the controls and applied full throttle. The plane soared up out of the river valley and banked to the east. They looked down through the right window panels and saw the curved shape of the high concrete dam and the lake that snaked back through the hills. They had climbed up out of the valley just before the backed water began. Now they could see the ancient parade ground near the dam. A road ran along one side of the grounds, and two buildings stood near the road. There was a barrier across the road between the buildings, and several cars were parked at either side.

Ashukian pointed to the road. "The frontier," he said.

Gould tapped the pilot's shoulder. "Take her down low over the road near those cars. I want to see if one of them is a gray Rolls-Royce."

He looked at Monique and smiled.

The Commander winged over and dropped down over the road, coming in low over the trees. The line of cars flashed by below them and Gould looked at Ashukian and smiled.

"Satisfied, policeman?" he said.

Ashukian nodded.

"All right, Mario. Take her down."

Nobody said anything as Benevento brought the Commander up to a near stall, then let the ship fall off into a sideslip, the flaps coming down full and the throttle suddenly drawn back. The plane fell sickeningly to the side, like the downward swing of a pendulum, then leveled and they were directly over the parade ground. He

dropped the nose and the ground came up at them rapidly, the trees at the side of the ground looming suddenly large, and still he held the nose down. Then, when it seemed that the ground was directly under their eyes, they suddenly heard an electric whining of the gear being lowered and the plane leveled and touched the rough surface. They jolted over the ground as Benevento fought to keep the Commander in one piece, braking slightly as the end of the field rushed toward them. With perhaps the distance of the plane's wingspan remaining, he slammed the left brake full on and the plane spun around in a tight left turn and came to a stop, its engines ticking over lightly.

"*Brutissimo,*" Benevento said, after a moment. "This thing is good for parts maybe, after this."

Gould threw open the side hatch of the plane and was running across the parade ground toward the road. Ashukian was at his side.

"We are lucky," Ashukian said. "We stop on Republic side of ground. OZNA men would already be shooting if we were in Yugoslavia."

They reached the road as a long black sedan stopped near the Republic side of the frontier barrier. Across the barrier, Gould could see the group of small black cars flanking the giant Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud sedan.

A side door of the black car opened, and as they ran along the road they saw Anastas Krasnovic emerge. The distinguished man with the great shock of white hair stood at the side of the car, his hat in his hand, looking across the parade ground at the Aero Commander. He seemed not to understand something, and bent and spoke to someone within the car. A second figure climbed out of the car, and Gould and Ashukian stopped for an instant. It was Zarov, his hat planted firmly on his head. He stood next to Krasnovic and spoke rapidly, then turned as Gould and the policeman began to run once more, shouting almost incoherently as they ran. Zarov stepped back, the entire scene jumping before Gould's eyes as he ran. He saw Zarov step to the side of the car, reaching into his jacket. Then, still running, he saw Zarov's hand come up with the long-barreled Luger pointing directly at him.

He stopped, reached into his jacket for the Swiss Luger and heard the sudden sounds of gunfire. He dropped to the ground, pulling Ashukian down next to him. They heard the silent whispers of the bullets passing close to them. Then they were up and running again, and Zarov had gone around to the other side of the car. Krasnovic stood rigid as a statue through all this, turning to look at the running figures of Ashukian and Gould as they came up to him. Then the engine of the black car roared and they saw Zarov behind the wheel, backing the car rapidly off the road, then swinging the wheel and steering back onto the road, directly toward them. Gould grabbed the Prime Minister's arm and pulled him to the side of the road as the big black car raced past them, then swerved onto the road and, with a clash of gears, headed for the turn that led to the dam. Gould dropped to his knee and held the Luger fully forward with both hands, steadying the pistol as he aimed at the moving target of the black car's wheels. He squeezed the trigger repeatedly until the magazine of the gun was empty and the knee-action recoil remained elevated. Then he rose and stood next to the Prime Minister as the black car began to swerve crazily along the road, out of control. It reached the turn near the dam, but did not follow the curve of the road. It smashed against the retaining fence along the dam's top, and hovered on its edge for a long moment. Then, slowly, the rear end of the car rose up and they heard the wrenching sound of tearing metal as the car slid off the lip of the dam and plunged down, out of their view, into the empty valley at the foot of the dam. They heard the crash, and then everything became quiet. Gould looked down and only then saw Ashukian lying in the road. Zarov had struck the policeman as he swerved back onto the road. He rushed to where Ashukian lay, and saw, to his relief, the man was moving. He kneeled next to Ashukian and touched his arm.

"Only the wind from my insides," Ashukian said heavily, and smiled.

Then Gould stood and approached Anastas Krasnovic slowly, introducing himself. Before he was able to finish his introductory sentence, he was interrupted by the

sounds of automobile engines being started. He looked around, seeing the large Rolls-Royce already moving, and the convoy of black OZNA cars turning on the road, following the car of the President of the Council of Ministers, as it moved north, away from the border.

Chapter Nineteen

THE GROUND lights, throwing their beams up along the sides of the needle-like monument, made it stand out sharply against the darkness of the night. Gould lowered his eyes from the view out the window and looked into the cool even eyes of Titus Banning once more. There was a trace of a smile on the older man's lips.

"A hundred and thirteen thousand dollars is a hell of a lot of money, Gould," Banning said.

"That's the list price of an Aero Commander 680F," Gould said tonelessly. "It's a shade cheaper than an atomic war, I'd say."

Banning finally broke down and laughed softly.

"They tried dismantling her and trucking her out," Gould explained. "But it was a waste of time. The fuselage was ripped to pieces, and the wing stresses were so far gone the whole damned ship would have had to be put back in the mold. They saved the engines. Giorgio Coradi is on the royal blacklist in Mantua, and I promised to make good. Imagine, Banning, the Count had to go home by train, like other human beings. And let me tell you, Yugoslavian trains leave something to be desired."

Banning was thinking of something else now. "How did he take the girl's death? Krasnovic, I mean."

"Pretty badly. There wasn't much love lost between him and me because of it. I think he holds me entirely responsible, but the idea of Balkan Federations are about as gone as a thing can be from his mind. He's somewhere in another world. The sheer idea that Zarov might have been trying to kill him is beyond his comprehension. I think when he saw that gray Rolls Royce turn around and drive away from the border, something went out of his life that was more important than either his daughter or himself."

"It is not the pleasantest thing to suddenly know that you've gone as far as you can go. There's no more up."

"Is that all of it?" Gould asked.

"What happened about the girl?"

"The Swiss police found the two Russians and closed the books on the whole deal. They never found the gun that killed her, though."

"Oh?"

"It's in a cabinet in my living room."

"Yes," Banning said. "Now about that temporary visa for the French girl. I won't say anything about what you pulled at Idlewild. But tell me, how did they let her on the plane in Orly without papers to get off here?"

Gould smiled. "You don't want to know how certain consular officials can be manipulated in Paris if they're personal friends, do you? Certain pieces of paper, with no records behind them, can still be made to look very official, especially to French immigration people."

"You shouldn't have called me from Idlewild," Banning said.

"I was not going to see her held in Immigration for ten minutes, if I could help it. I'm sorry, Banning, but I just didn't give a damn any more."

"You looked quite the pompous ass, trying to throw your privileged weight about with those claims of all your exalted connections," Banning said.

"Just the thing to finish off the role of rich American tourist, wouldn't you say?"

"Perhaps. But don't do it again."

"You can be sure of that," Gould said. "This playing God business doesn't appeal to me. I want my walking papers."

Banning spun his chair around and looked out the window into the hot Washington night. When he turned back to Gould, his expression was grave.

"I wonder what Philip Bainbridge was thinking during all these years?"

"I don't know," Gould said. "But I think he died a better death the way we buried him in 1945. I wouldn't think about it. It doesn't add up to anything, anyway."

Titus Banning compressed his lips and rubbed the side of his nose with a fingertip. This, Gould decided, had served to dismiss the topic of eulogies for Philip Bainbridge. There was nothing left to say.

He had been sitting here for close to two hours now, and the bits and pieces had been put where they belonged, and all that Gould could think of was the distant look in the eyes of Anastas Krasnovic when he had last seen him. The old man's eyes had looked more lost that last moment than they had looked when he had heard of his daughter's death. The sense of distaste returned to Gould each time he thought of it since that moment. It had followed him to Venice, where they left Coradi, and on across Europe to Paris where he and the girl had boarded a Pan Am Boeing 707 just about twenty-four hours earlier.

Now he sat across the desk from Banning and all that remained of the past days was a feeling from which he could not free himself. That, and a desire to be out of this office.

"Yes," Banning said suddenly, as if answering a question he had asked himself silently. "Tell me, Gould, you ever hunt mountain sheep?"

"Why, yes," Gould said, looking at him strangely.

"Where?"

"Up north of Billings, Montana. And once in Idaho."

"You know western Texas? It's pronghorn antelope country, really, but there are some nice broken patches of country down there. The last of the southerly mountain sheep herds. Very tricky bastards."

Gould did not say anything.

"There's not too much climbing involved in getting them down there. And they're somewhat smaller than the big Rocky Mountain ones. But there are some really bighorn sheep in among the south herds. And some of them are pure albinos."

"Interesting," Gould said.

"You're signed on for a pack trip down there at the end of this month," Banning said.

Gould smiled. "Is that an invitation?"

"Considering its source," Banning said lightly, "I would regard it as a command performance."

Bart Gould smiled and stood. Banning joined him and they walked together to the door of the small office.

"Gould," Banning said, "you weren't serious before, about the walking papers."

It was not a question.

"No," Bart Gould said. "I wasn't serious."

The two men shook hands and Gould closed the office door softly behind him. He left the building grounds by the side gate across from Lafayette Park, and stopped for a moment, looking back at the white building in the warm night. Then, after a moment, his thoughts turned to his own home in Georgetown, and Monique Clermont. He turned away from Lafayette Park and walked rapidly away into the night, his lips smiling as he thought of something she had said on a beach along the coast of Yugoslavia, and how it might well apply to everything there was between them now.

He could see her gray eyes smile as she had signed the register at the Ambassador Hotel on K Street before taking the taxi the rest of the way to his house. And when he had looked at her in the cab, he might have asked "why," but he hadn't. And she might have said "respectability before sacrifice," but she hadn't. They had both just smiled.

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